Lynne Sharon Schwartz • Clancy Sigal • Jonathan Penner

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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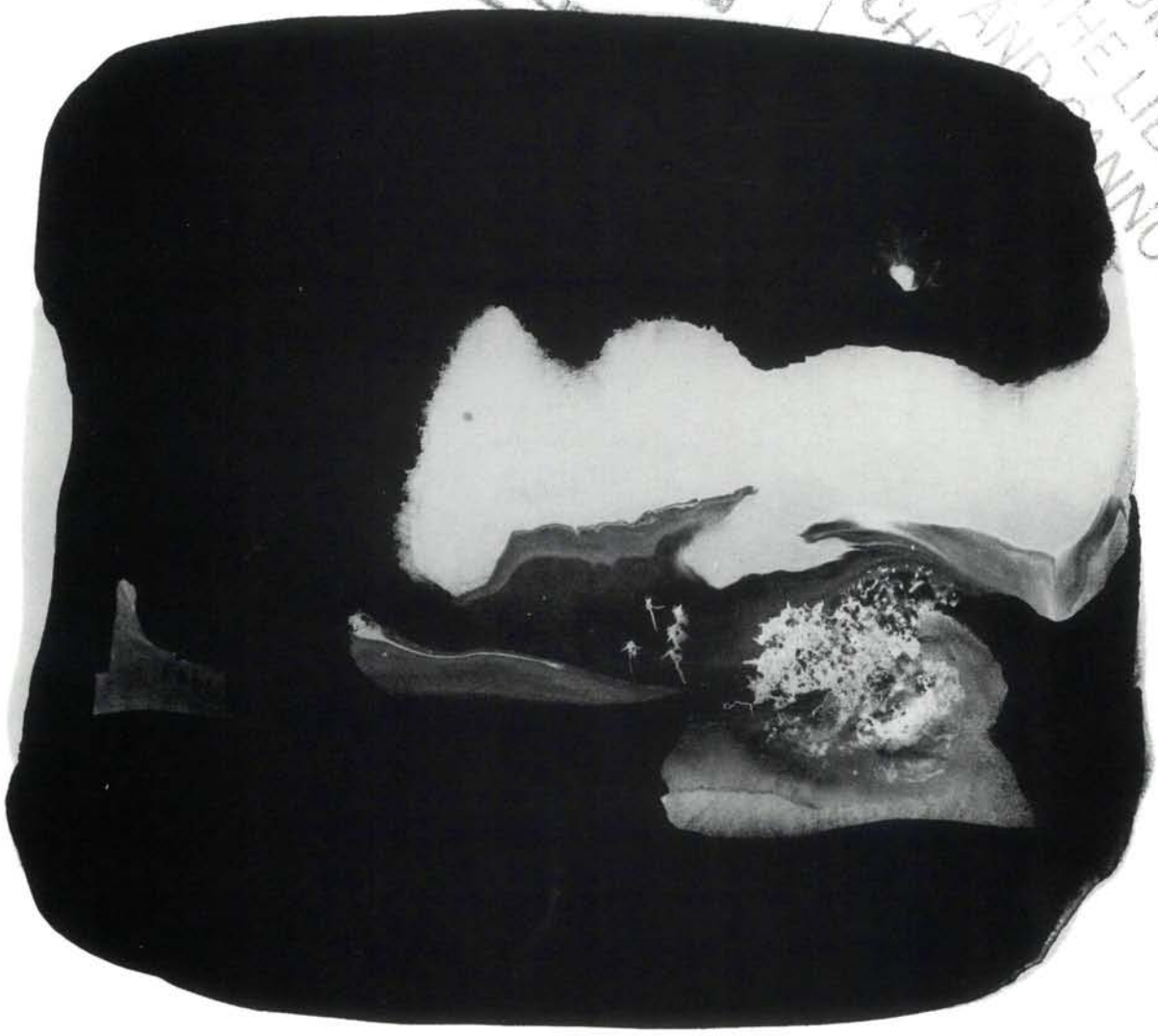

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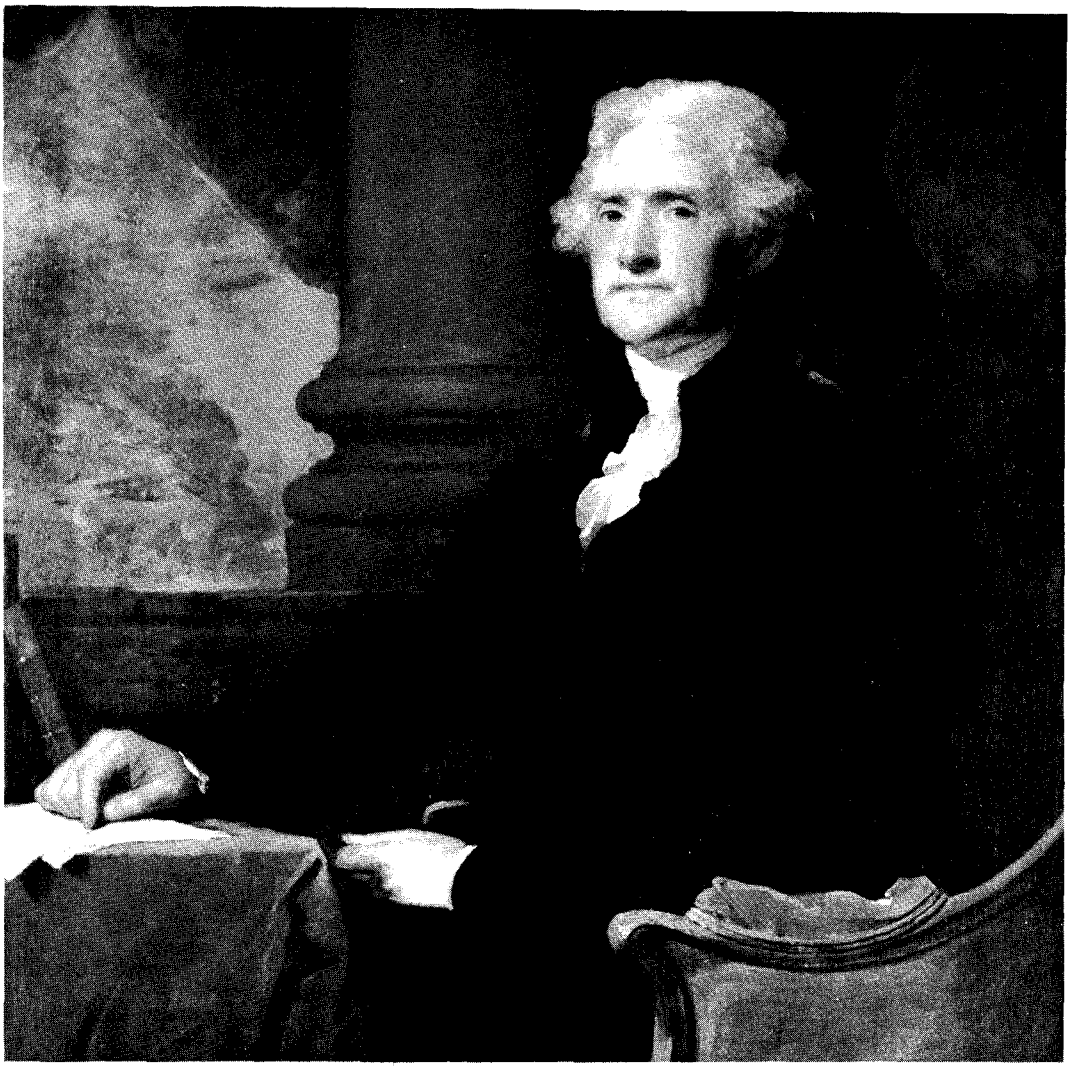

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

I am a subscriber to the N. American review and understand you are agent for that work in Richmond. it will be more convenient for me to have it furnished from that place because payment there is easier made. I shall be glad therefore to receive it from you. and this letter presented to Col°. Bernard Peyton, my correspdt of Richmond will ensure your receiving payment from him on my account, once a year or oftener if you chuse. I have received N°. 46. but not N°. 44. and 45. which I shall be glad therefore now to receive. accept the assurance of my respect.

Th: J

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AN EDITORIAL

Learning from the Tragedy of KAL 007

This might not be a bad time to remember that the Soviet Union has historically been jealous for its borders, and that long before the 1917 Revolution the state of Russia in its various incarnations was timid about sharing in the civilization of the outside world. It wasn't until the reign of Peter the Great, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, that Russians were encouraged—after the model of Peter himself—to travel to western Europe, and outsiders were encouraged to spend time within the confines of Mother Russia. Even then, the enlightened czar's chief motives were nationalistic and selfish: He wanted the technology of the West—its mathematics, its engineering—and he wanted its military expertise, especially the naval wisdom available from England and Holland. He chose St. Petersburg—now Leningrad—as his capital for reasons of political strategy, and the city became Russia's "window on the world" by virtue of its access to the Baltic. That window has been small enough, and frequently closed; Peter is supposed to have said: "We need Europe for a few decades. Later on we must turn our back on it."

Not much has changed. The modern USSR is as large and influential as that country has ever been, and has succeeded since World War Two in building a buffer of satellite states between itself and the West. For nearly forty years we have faced a wall of suspicion whose blankness has been interrupted only occasionally by a cultural or athletic or private-person window. As ever, Russia needs and distrusts the West. The continuing jealousy for its borders has been exemplified by the Soviet Union's decision to build the Berlin Wall, by its reluctance to allow its citizens freedom to travel abroad, by its interception and destruction of a variety of British and American military aircraft—a British Haviland bomber which strayed from the Hamburg-Berlin corridor in 1953, an American RB-50 which made too close an approach to the Siberian coast later that same year, the famous U-2 spy plane in 1960, among others—and most recently by its shocking action of destroying a civilian passenger plane, Korean Air Lines flight 007, which entered Soviet air space.

Some of the questions raised by this last incident may never be answered. We may not learn why the KAL flight was so far off course, why its navigation lights were apparently extinguished, why its pilot failed to respond to a Russian SU-15's tracers. We are not likely to learn why KAL 007 was not informed by American or Japanese controllers that it was more than a hundred miles north of its correct heading, or why an American R-135 aircraft was in the same area at about the same time. Least of all will we learn anything useful from the charges and countercharges of the U.S. and Soviet governments—"liars," "spy plane," and all that.

But some things we already know, from history old and new. We know about Soviet distrust and jealousy, Soviet ambivalence in the face of a nation (ours) whose technology it covets even as it fears our strength, Soviet ambition for influence and reluctance to seek it directly. At the same time we know about our own distrust of the Soviet Union, our own fears about its strength, and our own ambition for influence in the world; and we know that our military aircraft have for thirty-five years been testing and probing the borders of the Soviet Union—in the Baltic, in the Black Sea, in the Sea of Japan—looking for weaknesses in the USSR's early-warning capabilities. Just in case, one assumes, a weakness might have to be exploited.

We believe the Soviets are as appalled as we are by the tragic error they have made. Since it is an error they cannot unmake, they can only explain it as thoroughly as they are able—hence the clumsy Western-style press conferences—while at the same time they try to excuse it by adopting the self-righteous posturing characteristic of both sides in our cold wars. God help us, that we have missed the lesson once again.

The lesson, it seems obvious, is that the West must find ways to calm these rising tensions between itself and the Soviet Union—to stop feeding Soviet paranoia lest it grow to infect us. The traditional posturing, ours or theirs, is irrelevant and dangerous. If one result of the KAL incident is the ascendancy of the hawks in the U.S. administration and in Congress—yes to the MX, yes to missile deployments, yes to Pentagon requests, yes to bringing the possibility of nuclear war that much closer—then not only have 269 men, women, and children died absurdly and for no cause; they have led the way for the rest of us.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Three months ago on this page we said something vague about offering short stories to see our readers through "a long hot summer," never of course realizing the eventual dimensions of the summer of 1983. We find ourselves, now, in a position to paraphrase the gentleman of the original shaggy-dog story: "Not *that* damned hot." In recompense, this number of the NAR offers fiction, poetry, and essays to see all of us through a pleasant autumn—neither too hot nor too cold, not wet or dry to an extreme, not so brief as to exclude Indian summer or so long as to depress us with bitter leaflessness. . . .

Disturbances in the Field the new novel by Lynne Sharon Schwartz, is a book to reward the most demanding reader—human, poignant, a tragedy saved from despair by the intelligence and character of its central figures. Harper & Row is the novel's publisher, but NAR readers may enjoy one of the book's early chapters beginning on page ten. . . . Jonathan Penner's story at page 21 is from his collection, *Private Parties*, winner of this year's Drue Heinz Literature Prize. . . . Both Lorraine Duggin (page 36) and Sarah Rossiter (page 29) are new to this magazine's roster of storytellers; introduce them to your friends.

Nine years ago this month, *The North American Review* devoted most of its pages to the life and work of the poet James Hearst—Iowa-born and -bred, but an artist whose work has always overflowed the boundaries of regionalism. This summer Jim Hearst died, two weeks short of his 83rd birthday, regretting only (he said) that he would not see Halley's comet a second time. Jim was a particular friend to this magazine—though he was reluctant to be a contributor, fearful that friendship would skew our editorial judgments in his favor—and his passing is no light loss. No words can quite sum up the man, but Ken Lash approached the matter so, in his introduction to Jim's work in the NAR in 1974:

"Jim catches things by the tail just as they're flashing by. And lets us see. It is not always pleasant, what he catches (*he* didn't put it there), but he lets us see it, either way. Hands it over, actually, then goes back to work. Hard work. The softness is in the generosity."

A little book-keeping:

Sometimes subscribers write to inquire about expiration dates, a question that can also be answered by the upper-right-hand corner of the NAR mailing label. Those four digits indicate the volume and number of the last paid-up issue; this September 1983 issue is volume 268, number 3, or (as the label would have it) 2683. The volume number increases by one with each new year; thus the December 1983 number will be 2684, March 1984 will be 2691, and so on, ad infinitum. . . . Authors are reminded that the NAR will *not* be reading fiction until October 1, 1984, though we will continue to be receptive to non-fiction and poetry in our usual selective way. While the editor is on sabbatical, the magazine is under the care of our managing editor, Sandra Witt. . . . And a glance ahead: the December NAR will feature a special section dealing with San Francisco, guest edited by Kenneth Lash.

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★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

REVIEW

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China Notebook: Love Story

Bought some cards showing a valiant telephone linewoman in heavy sheepskin repairing a break in the midst of a howling blizzard. She wields her pliers and smiles into the driving wind. The clerks laughed. "This card was made in Jiang Qing's time," the friend with me said. "She taught that women could do anything men could do. Now we don't believe this. Now we know men and women are different."

Went by Gudrun's to see if she wanted to run. "That will be good!" Her English is pretty good for someone who just picked it up. (David says she learned here.) I love the way she says *good*, with a long U. *Gūd.* Riva parades around imitating her accent. *That will be gūd!* Twenty-five and handsome, rosy complexion, and a very short, good-looking haircut. Turns out though that Chinese think she looks unfeminine.

"Those boots are man's boots," H. said in class. I was explaining *macho*. There are no macho Chinese, it isn't a style here, so there are no examples. And no western movies, so I couldn't refer to film (*Singing In the Rain* was shown at the Institute last year and much enjoyed by all).

"Can a woman be macho?" R. asked. "The German teacher. Is she macho?"

I must have looked surprised. I *was*.

"She looks mean."

"She wears her hair like a man."

"Ugly."

"Those boots are man's boots."

Actually I'd been coveting her boots, a sturdy, fur-lined Finnish product. They looked warm and comfortable, practical but not particularly masculine. Well. What could I say. The class saw I'd been rendered speechless, and we all laughed at me. I explained I didn't know her but had seen her around and that to me she looked attractive.

She likes to stay inside the Institute grounds, so we ran around the tennis and basketball courts, skirting gawkers, babies, wire, broken bricks and mud. The air was awful, so wore my *kou zhao*. Chinese wear them only when riding bikes in the cold. Gudrun told me about Da Li. He's been living with her for a while now, which infuriates the administration. They are royally pissed, as we used to say in high school.

"We want to get married, but the leaders don't want this. They don't want Hans to marry foreigners, you probably know this. When I came here I loved China. I learned Chinese, I liked the food and the people. I made a lot of friends, I think socialism is good, it is good for the people now, not like before Liberation. The students liked me and I worked hard. I had twenty-two hours of class a week. It was good. I met Da Li here; he was studying Japanese. He doesn't know German, but I know Chinese. He became my boyfriend.

"Now it's not good. My friends got angry. Why do you do this, they asked me. This is not good. First they accused me of changing my mind in the middle. I told them I didn't want to get married. It was true, I said this. Then of course I changed my mind. This is not good, they said. They acted as if I lied to them.

"If you marry someone from your department, that will be good, they said. Marry another teacher. Don't marry a student. They don't marry down. They marry up. And your marriage will fail, they said, because you have no common language. But I speak Chinese! And Da Li can learn German. But these are all excuses. In the end they just say, this is not good.

"The leaders liked me and let me do anything. Now they don't like me. I asked to teach another year. The Institute wants foreign teachers to stay a long time, and Da Li will graduate next year, so I should teach for them while he finishes. No, they said. At the end of July you must leave. You cannot live at the Institute after July.

"So Da Li has asked permission to leave the school. Students cannot marry, you know this. This is the law. The government doesn't want to mix business and pleasure. To be a student they think should be business. They think this will lead quickly to fast progress. So to marry you must leave school. Last week Da Li went to the leaders. We will discuss it, they said. So now we wait.

"If he gets permission from the school then he must go back to his old unit at the factory. If the *Danwei* agrees to take him back, that would be good. Then he has a salary and ration coupons. He has a *Danwei*. Then he must ask the *Danwei* permission to marry and then permission to leave his job and go with me to Germany. I would stay in China if they let me teach, but they say *no*. So we go to Germany. I have to have official papers that say I am not married in Germany. And other papers, many other papers. Da Li will have to get a passport. At any step they can make us wait a long time. At any step they can stop us.

"I have gone to the *Waiban* in Tianjin and the *Waiban* in Peking. I told them that we want to get married. I had to convince them we are very serious about this. They said yes, but first the school has to let him go."

The *Waiban* is the Foreign Affairs Bureau, supposed to take care of foreigners. Don't understand exactly what their power is. They take complaints at any rate.

We walked back to the apartments. Women with string bags of vegetables, parents carrying babies, students reading and reciting in the courtyard, workmen digging trenches for sewers. The workmen looked at us, they always do. Faces impassive. Can't tell *what* goes on behind those eyes. Possibly they discuss the evil foreign woman and speculate on my friendship with her. She reminds me of the woman on the card—when I saw it I first thought the woman was Russian—such rosy cheeks! Gudrun has this tough, healthy look, but my impulse is to want to protect her. I doubt the whole Chinese nation is going to kow-tow to her desire. If they don't get permission to marry, Gudrun will have to go back to Germany—they won't renew her visa—and Da Li will

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get it. "They'll pack him off to the countryside," Chuck said, "and that'll be that."

The Hans' dislike of intermarriage is *there.* Chinese friends acknowledge this, but their explanations lack force and conviction. "It's because Chinese families are very close," K. said. "If my son marries a foreigner, he may go with her to her country and then I will never see him again." "Uh-huh," I said, not believing a word. Too simple to account for the intensity of the feeling here. Fox Butterfield's *Alive in the Bitter Sea* reports that intermarriage is a form of national dishonor. Parents of a girl dating a foreign student were told by security agents that " . . . it is a shameful thing for China. Foreigners are always trying to ferret out our secrets and destroy the revolution." There are some good and palpable reasons for distrusting foreigners. Ning Lao Tai-tai (*Daughter of Han)* says:

> The first time I saw a foreigner I was very small, perhaps six or seven. I was so frightened that I fell to the ground and hid my face in my arms. I crouched and dared not look up until they told me he had gone. He was a big man with a beard and a big voice. . . . Foreigners' clothes looked like nothing under the heavens. But I think what frightened me most were the eyes, so far back and sunken into the face.

These foreigners (including Japanese) then proceeded to divvy up the Hans' cities among themselves.

"Foreigners are always trying to steal. . . ."

Watch out, the foreigner will rip you off. . . .

Now the foreign woman is ripping off an innocent, young man. And he's cooperating.

Analogy with Jiang Qing's romance with Mao. In an odd but undeniable way Jiang Qing is like a foreign woman in China. She was all

the things Chinese women shouldn't be—aggressive, outspoken, daring. Quite a few friends have told me the story of how she "stole Mao away from his wife." No one dared question Mao for "cooperating" with her, so the guilt falls on Jiang Qing. In the stories (related by both women and men) Mao is blameless, the helpless pawn of a wily woman. He Zizhen is the Virgin, Jiang Qing is the whore, and the hero is innocent, a good man who is tricked, used.

Mao was secure. But Da Li is just a student. He can be got.

I hate being COLD. Teaching with my coat on, eating meals with my coat on, shitting with my coat on. Bumbling around in these thousand pairs of underwear. All this padding is ponderous on the spirit. I feel like a giant female musk ox. . . . Riva, Chris and David were playing in the ruins today, they *know* they're not supposed to. It's dangerous, the roof could collapse. We didn't know they were there, but Lao Ren sent Tsao, the old man, over to get them. Gudrun said she saw them coming back with him, looking sheepish. "Foreigners making trouble," she said, winked.

Peter thinks Gudrun is too idealistic. When he told her we were staying six months she said *that's too short. You cannot understand China.* Which he agreed with, but it was the haughty manner in which she said it. Jeanine thinks she's idealistic and naive. A kind of pretty, young Germanic utopian striding around filled with energy. "Look how fast she learned Chinese," Jeanine said. "And English. And how many classes she teaches, how hard she works. She expects a lot from herself. She expects a lot from things, from everybody."

She does seem naive about Chinese and their customs. The fact that Da Li moved in with her is a scandal here. We think nothing of this, but the Chinese are scrupulous about sex. Chinese don't move in with Chinese. Chinese marry. And scarcely so much as hold hands before the wedding. David married Tsu, but they did it according to the rules (and even then there were problems, her *Danwei* delaying the passport, etc.). To live openly with Da Li (and in Gudrun's apartment, provided rent free by the Institute) must have looked like flagrant flouting of the rules. A deliberate, calculated insult.

At the time Gudrun must have been in a dither, first intending not to marry, then falling all over the other way in love. All that heady agitation. From *her* point of view she liked China so much she even fell for a Chinese. So she was puzzled at the hostile reaction—didn't her loving Da Li "prove" her loyalty to China? But Chinese don't comprehend this. It's bad enough for a Chinese to challenge the way of doing things, but for a foreigner to do it is a slap in the face. Gudrun thumbing her nose at China. "We have always treated her well," N. said to me. "Why did she become insolent?"

Chilly, but signs of leaves on the trees. We ran half an hour. Administrators getting on their bikes for home, students heading for the canteen with tin boxes. Yesterday I was talking to X. when Da Li passed. "I hate him," X. said. "His father is a high cadre in the Army, so he thinks he can do anything and there will be no consequences. My parents are workers, I have to be careful." So there is some jealousy involved. When I told Gudrun this, she nodded.

"Da Li was not a model student. He didn't always do what the authorities said. Now he wants to marry me, this is another way of refusing to be good."

"If his father's a cadre, can't he pull some strings?"

"No! Didn't I tell you this? His parents don't want us to marry. His mother comes to my house several times and week and asks us to stop. She tries to bully Da Li into changing his mind."

What rotten luck! Nobody needs his mother on the enemy's side. . . .

A couple of students took our picture. They tried to be discreet, pretending to be photographing each other, but as we ran past—straining, panting, dripping—one suddenly turned the camera on us. It amused me, and I made a face, but Gudrun

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was irate. Her nerves are getting frazzled.

"Let's hope," Peter said, "they're really in love."

"I saw you with the German teacher," M. said when I walked into class.

I nodded. "Now I know her, and I can report she's a very nice person, definitely not macho."

Laughter. All right, they will agree she is not macho, if I say so. I am the teacher, the foreign expert. I am the authority on the correct use of words. But the fact remains they think of Gudrun as a scandalous piece of exotica—unfeminine, aggressive, "loose," ugly. I asked Peter if he thinks Gudrun is ugly.

"She looks athletic, not my type but not ugly. A little forbidding though, the way she looks at you hard before she smiles."

I explained she's near-sighted.

Unfeminine, aggressive, "loose," ugly. Liberation left some things unchanged. Chinese women have big feet now, but they're still suppose to be "feminine." This does *not* mean glamorous, frail, dainty, sexy, elegant or compassionate. (Except for compassion, these qualities are considered "bourgeois" and avoided. In some cases compassion too has been treated as bourgeois. "I was criticized during the Cultural Revolution," a teacher told me, "for taking soup to a sick student.") To be feminine you must not, in any given situation, aspire to power. Jiang Qing went after power ruthlessly, and now those qualities that lead to getting it—aggressiveness, nonconformity, boldness, initiative—are taboo. The ideal female in 1982 is passively obedient, hard-working and unobtrusive, self-sacrificing and self-effacing. Chuck might argue that men too must be self-effacing to survive here, but there's a difference between "keeping a low profile" politically and deliberately suppressing ability.

A popular story by Shen Rong, "At Middle Age," illustrates the ideal. The heroine is an eye surgeon, admired because she does more work than humanly possible, loved by her patients because she acts as surrogate mother and therapist. At home she is willing drudge and patient helpmate. It's her husband who needs more time, and she happily manages to provide this. In short, a saint. Then she collapses. The story ends with her very tentative recovery. The doctor declares her well enough to leave the hospital, but as she prepares to walk to the waiting car she feels "feeble and cold, though so warmly dressed. Her legs trembled when she stood up." And leaning "on her husband's shoulder, Lu walked slowly toward the gate. . . ." She's "recovered," but henceforth her functioning will be minimal. Alive, and that's all. Her promise has been destroyed. The message is clear and

chilling: women, in an effort to comply with the ideal, are killing themselves.

Saw a documentary of model women. Portraits of a ballerina, engineer, peasant painter, cadre, scholar. The scholar most thoroughly limned the ideal. In each successive scene she has her nose in a book. She reads in the library, office, home, en route. Even strolling near magnificent forsythia she lowers her eyes and reads away. She never speaks and is never shown actually writing, only copying notes into a notebook.

Gudrun has not been CIRCUMSPECT by Chinese standards.

Went running alone yesterday, so went out on the streets. I'm a "sight," but like to feel I'm running *somewhere*. Was nearly back when the dust storm hit. Everybody—me and a million Chinese—dashing for cover, it was like the bomb had come. The dust gets on people's nerves. And the cold. Now Riva, Chris and David have taken to searching through the rubble and breaking bricks. "Let's go bust bricks," I heard Riva holler down from the balcony. They came back pretty filthy.

Today when I asked, Gudrun said Da Li had gone to see the leaders again. More than a month has passed, but they haven't made a decision.

"And today," she said, "I walked into the classroom and all the desks had been put back in rows. Chinese like rows, it's Confucian, but I teach conversation so we always have the desks in a circle. The students like it. And no one ever told us not to do this.

"So I asked the students who did this. *The leaders said we must*, they said. Students have to do what the leaders say. If you don't they will criticize you and write something bad in your papers. When the leaders liked me, everything I did was good. Now they don't like me, everything I do is not good.

"Their methods of education are very old, from Confucius. They want help from the West but they don't want students to form pacts, to discuss and criticize, maybe to change the way of life. They put the desks in rows so the students can't look at each other. They only want students to learn technology from books. Everything else must stay—what do you say in English?—rigid. The authorities want China to stay pure."

When Gudrun sweats she turns rosy and pretty. I just sweat. It's got to be good for them to see us lathered like horses. We've got to seem more human, less foreign. Like the British woman back in concession days, when her Chinese friend introduced her to another Chinese and said, "You need not fear her. She is good and kind, just as if she were Chinese."

Sparrows twittering, Mrs. Wang on her doorstep scrubbing her kids' clothes, students pacing back and forth reciting their lessons aloud. German, Spanish, French, English, Japanese. *Donnez-moi le pain, s'il vous plait, dit Madame De Gaulle.* "Oh hello Comrade Jane, I didn't know you were back. . . ." No one has a private place to practice, so they practice in the open air.

Yesterday the school called all students in the Japanese Department to a meeting to denounce Da Li. The leaders told the students to avoid him. His involvement with the foreign woman is *muy malo*. Gudrun said, "It's official now. Da Li is a bad Chinese."

"And you're an evil foreign woman," I teased. We giggled so much we had to stop running. . . .

Still I can feel she's scared. Now the kids are making "weapons," they strut around looking tough, cracking whips. Riva said, *Mom, I'm getting so rough I won't know how to play with girls when we get back.* . . .

Nobody ever seems to hurry. People are busy, but they go about it as though they're out for a stroll. The hectic West can go to hell, this is the East. The East, and with history this long you must feel a kind of cosmic

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resignation—things have been going on so long, how could it ever be otherwise? And given one billion people the idea of possible demise seems laughable. Foreigners and barbarians come and go, the kingdom stays.

Though the men somehow manage to look more relaxed than the women. Maybe it's work—the women have more work to do, on the job and then at home. Or maybe it's the cigarettes, since only men smoke. If there's time for a smoke the revolution must be going along. . . .

Waiting is getting on Gudrun's nerves. Today she made one of those empty hostile threats that signals an imminent explosion. All the foreign teachers have decided to send a letter to the administration on her behalf. John Minford drafted it, a short, polite note to the effect that we hope the Institute will facilitate their marriage plans quickly. Lots of argument among us as to whether or not a petition is likely to bring desired results, but we all decided we want to let them know how we feel. Gudrun came for signatures, then we took off.

The heat has come, and the kids' heavy artillery given way to water fights. Roses in bloom! Flowering vines! It actually smells *good* right now in Tianjin. Off with the *kou zhao* and run like hell!

Gudrun couldn't run yesterday. She had to see the head of her department, but didn't know why. Turned out he only wanted to give her the gift they give teachers who are leaving. She didn't go to the banquet the night before when they presented us with presents. Afterward she was relieved but furious. "Why didn't he tell me why he wanted to see me!"

Hellish hot, but we racked up another six miles. The students memorized another twenty-five verbs, the pigs got another half gin fatter, and the Tianjin No. 1 Bicycle Factory made another bike every 8.34 seconds. . . .

Gudrun appeared suddenly at the door of our room and announced they got permission for Da Li to leave school! Maybe the letter helped. "Now he has gone to his factory to talk to the head man," she said, then laughed. "He took along a lot of foreign cigarettes."

She looked radiant. *One thing* going their way at last. Though only one thing. Later Peter said, "If they don't take him back, there's real trouble. No ration coupons, no salary, no nothing. . . ."

May well have been the hottest day of the year. Everybody's movements desultory. Languid basketball. The slowest tennis match ever played. The guys were on the court in shorts, the girls still in sweatpants. As usual we foreign women flaunted skin. It's pardonable, though, in the service of sports. A lot of leg in a two hour movie of the championship girls' volleyball team. "Very healthy," Lao Chen said, approving, when we came back yesterday, dripping.

Heat, and more nastiness from Da Li's mother.

"She came twice, yesterday and today. She went to the *Waiban* and tried to get them to stop us. *My husband is a cadre in the Army, you should do what we want.* A few days later she went back to the *Waiban* again. But I think the *Waiban* does not like this. During the Cultural Revolution the Army had power over civil bureaus. They had to do everything the Army said. Now a lot of these bureaus don't like the Army. So the *Waiban* may decide to ignore his parents. And to help Da Li and me. This would be good."

She seemed hopeful, I had to give her a hug. We walked back, did some stretches in the courtyard. The girls have been wearing skirts for a month now and the men white shirts. After all that winter worker's blue, white looks like a riot of color. Straightlaced as custom is, everybody looks a little blowsy in this heat. . . . But there's just no way to tell what's ahead for Gudrun and Da Li. One must wait for the Emperor's decree.

Another furnace of a day, and I got to babbling about the International Women's Day festivities, how the Vice-Mayor of Tianjin, a man, had given the address, how I have yet to meet one Chinese who's even heard of Doris Lessing (oh well, they haven't heard of Norman Mailer either). I rattled on, Gudrun unusually quiet, so I finally shut up and asked the news.

"A terrible thing happened today. I telephoned to my parents in Germany. First I wrote a letter telling them I'm getting married, and I thought they have got the letter now, so I telephoned. And my mother, my mother told me she doesn't want this! My mother! I still hardly can believe this."

Gudrun *doesn't* need this, I thought. But I wasn't surprised. This is pretty much how it's been going, as though these events are meant to be "an education" for her. Asked what her father thought.

"He doesn't say yes or no. He only said *I will send you the paper you want,* the document that says I am not married in Germany. But my mother—always I thought without thinking that she will help me."

Da Li's factory is going to decide by the 10th, but I won't be here. Today was our last run. We did a marathon, one whole hour, we must have gone at least ten miles. Had the feeling we could have gone on and on. Gudrun seemed cheery enough, a fighter hanging in there, she'll run as long as it takes.

Which could be long. Took a bath, sat down to write this. The heat, once it sets in, doesn't stop, not even at night. Peter can't sleep. I sleep but sweat. The cold, when it was here, didn't stop either. Seasons come and go, but any given weather here feels relentless. What comes stays, and you set yourself to get through it without windchimes. And without ice, in this case. The Northern Chinese must be inured to this, the doggedness of things. They go on about business. Smoke a lot of cigarettes, study physics, manufacture deep core boring drills, raise pigs. Sweep the streets and, when they finish sweeping, start over.

Everybody seems to accept that the way to get ahead is to keep going. It's all immense—history is immense, the population immense, Mao's shadow immense. The weather immense. Why try to hurry?

They don't hurry for each other, why would they hurry for Gudrun?

We got back to the U.S. and there was a letter waiting from Gudrun. An announcement, red "double happiness," saying they got married! I'm dying to know the details but will have to wait. . . . —*Marilyn Krysl*

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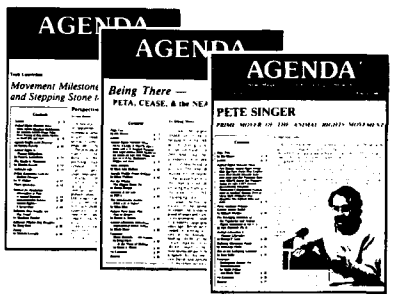
Why do people sink whaling ships, release dolphins, boycott veal...?



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CUTTINGS

The Last Quarter

It's said that most novelists write the same book again and again. Characters, setting, plot all may change, but it's essentially the same book. A book is a life. The life keeps changing, but after a point the person inside does not. The way life is looked at crystallizes. You can change what is looked at, even fiddle with the focus, but the result is identifiably you. If you're any good, that is. If you have a way that is your own, that has become your voice.

But why, having said your say, keep talking? Why another book and yet another? Obviously, because you're a writer, that's what you do. And, it's proposed, you are what you write. Then, presumably, if you stop you lose your "are"? A poet friend of mine says you keep on because you're leaving your trail, like the slime of a snail. Maybe, but there's no snail's pace about it. Even with advancing years. Especially with advancing years. The intensity of effort in doing that book seems to increase as the writer grows older.

I've had occasion recently to get in touch with a considerable number of older writers, soliciting contributions for the upcoming NAR issue on San Francisco. Whether they agreed to contribute or not, there was a consistency of reaction. "My god, I'm so busy, I've got a Spetember deadline from my publisher and. . . ." "I'm into my third year on this goddamned novel!" "I've just won the Gulliver prize and my agent. . . ." Others asked me about the possibility of reviews, about finding places to publish certain of their works, complained of insufficient notice and rude ingratitude. All of them long since "successful" writers . . . and pursuing success with, it seemed, ever more fevered intensity.

After a certain point and/or age, what does Sammyrunning have to offer? Money? OK, if you really need it. A month or two of being lionized? That palls quickly, but yes, it's always welcome to get shown off instead of having to do it for yourself. Prizes, readings, invitations to "the lists," all those premiums in the crackerjack-writer box? All good, but in what is a matter of relative moments you're back again in front of the empty page, alone. And aging. There's really nothing "success" can do for you now. It's a shrinking thing if you've had it, and too late to make a real difference if you haven't. You're in the last quarter of your life. Feeling good enough in the morning is of first importance now. There isn't any second.

To feel good enough today you must have written yesterday. But how much? And more significantly, for whom? An audience? That's becoming silly. You're on your way out, most of them are staying behind. (Assuming there will be an earth to stay behind on.) You've got things to do, for yourself. You've got to learn to write better. There are things to try, to get it, finally, "right." Time matters now, there aren't years for this, years for that, time to offer yourself up to publishing commitments. There's a different order of activity that needs doing—a slowing down, a transition from hunting to a kind of patient passivity close to holy begging. The kind that might put in your bowl that scrap of conviction you need, that penny for the boatman. And in the curious twist of passages,

you must beg this from yourself. This notice, this review.

And yet. And yet. What is one to do for "events"? For "things" to wake up to? Outward things that signal movement, getting there. Is one to spend the last part of life driving alone across Utah? You can find yourself in the desert all right, but who's to hear your shout of discovery? You began writing for that shout—first to shout it, second—and necessary to

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completion—to have it heard. If a tree falls in the writer's forest and there is none but him to hear, it fell all right but what an unmighty fall was there.

To be heard is to be seen. I used to think "Look at me" was a childish thing. Now I know it is the child practicing to become the adult. But having felt "Stop showing off" in childhood, and administered it to our own children, we're forever aware of that childish component. That fond and foolish need to be regarded. Noticed. Reviewed. Invited. It's demeaning. Carried to a Norman Mailer pitch it can be embarrassing. But avoided, dodged, not undertaken—hiding our light away in embittered shyness—is the path to Surly, the road to downtown Cynic.

Life is choices, we're told. Some are better than others. Yes, but neither is good enough. The only satisfactory choice is "Both."

Dying is no choices. No more choices. At some point—an instant, a year—we are left with the sum of choices we have made. No more doing. Looking, now. Backward, because we cannot see forward. And alone, no more company. Just us and our dented begging bowl. I wonder how it is if we arrive at that point with our running shoes still on? Still engaged in the pounce and roar of living. Is that the way not to go gently into that good night? Little of wisdom, of dignity, of the soft and comforting (to whom?) passage portrayed throughout time by the very tale-tellers and artists who refuse it for themselves? Is it a case of "Do as I say, not as I do?" Or is it that art—emotion recollected in tranquility, Wordsworth said—is largely made at fever pitch? That the artist only feels really alive when he's breathless? And it's life he's chasing so doggedly, tricked out as the bitch Success?

And wising up would kill him dead?

It may all come down to the audience you're playing for. If wise old age and accepted death are social obligations, forms—as in older societies—then that is the incumbent choice. Given the dignity of age, you must repay it. In our society age, given nothing, owes nothing. Except defiance. Stomp on the fingers of those climbing up behind you. Throw your shadow as wide as you can. Spit, and if your mouth's too dry, eat some prunes and let 'em have it.

—Kenneth Lash

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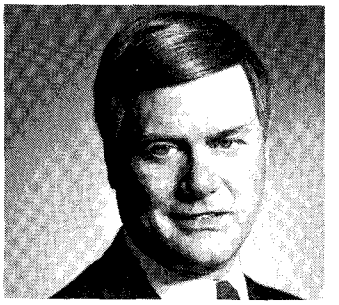

Help a friend get through the day without a cigarette. They might just quit forever. And that's important. Because good friends are hard to find. And even tougher to lose.

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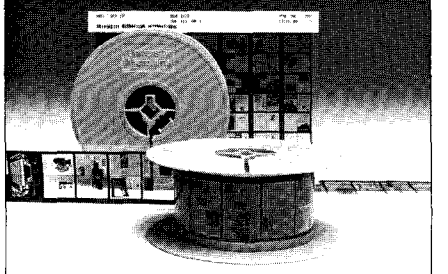

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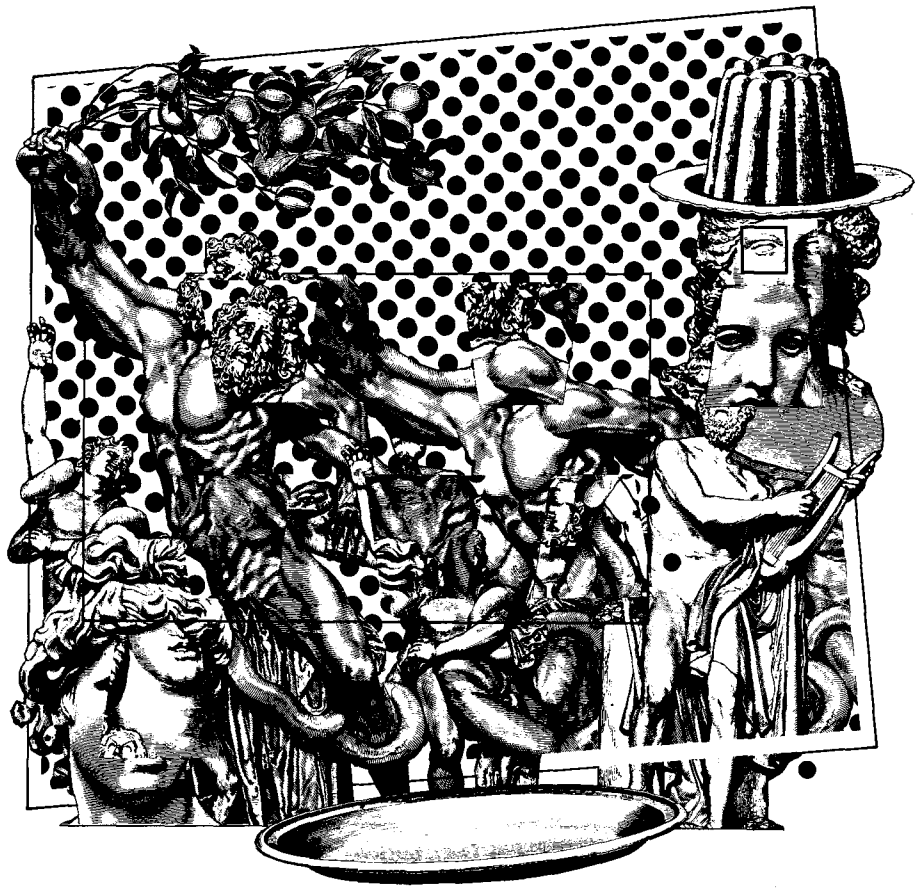
LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ

Earth. Water. Air. Fire.



SCHOOLING, 1957

In college we took for granted our private distortions and perversities. They were not yet called "hang-ups." We might deplore them as we deplored a birthmark or a thickness of the ankle, but that they were ours no less inseparably we never doubted. The fluid issues, open to constant reëxamination, were ideas. They drew our fervent emotions like pipers charming rats. Over chocolate chip cookies in the small hours, we thrilled to Plato's parable of prisoners in the cave, sadly debarred from the light of true wisdom. Through the grimy glass of iron-grilled dormitory windows we too—Nina, Gabrielle, Esther, and I—watched shadows, cast by intermittent traffic under Broadway's street lights, and nodded sagely. Girlish still, we played with our ideas like jacks, feeling their cold hardness, pressing our fingertips against their sharp points and round protruberances, testing how many we could scoop up at once and cradle in our palms—twosies, threesies, foursies! Thales, Anaximenes, Anaximander, Heraclitus—their names as exotic as their accounts of the nature of the universe. The earth is made of water. The earth is made of air. No, the earth is made of the four elements mingling, crowding each other out in a struggle for preëminence. No. "This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it always has been, is, and will be—an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures. . . . The sun is new each day." The earth is fire. Heraclitus, sagest of all.

Other girls might pick up and drop the boys across the street at Columbia. Our way of being fickle was switching allegiance from Plato to Aristotle. For two weeks we thought Plato the last word, and prematurely believed the adage quoted by our winning Professor Boles, disheveled and abstracted as a philosophy teacher should be: that all the rest of philosophy was merely a footnote. Till Aristotle, who came dragging the reputation of a plodder. He even looked dull: the pages in his text were thinner, the lines of type closer together. But Eureka! The whole

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"Earth. Water. Air. Fire." is a chapter from *Disturbances in the Field*, a novel, published this month by Harper & Row.

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material world Plato had left behind returned incarnate, every seed, every egg with an earthly destiny to fulfill. Other girls might aspire to diamond rings or posts in student government; our mission was to locate Truth on whatever library shelf it might be found. And to see, as some hope to see God, entelechy: essence unfurling itself in the passage from potential to actual reality.

We slipped into middle age and a turnabout occurred. We have seen so many ideas come and go; they appear on the horizon as fleetingly as rainbows, they rise and fall and rise again like hemlines. They are our cast-off familiars, we keep them in the attic with our inappropriate dresses, too sentimentally valued to throw away, worn now and then in a frivolous mood. There is a place for Heraclitus and the notion of genesis in fiery strife, a place for patient Aristotle and even for the weightless Bishop Berkeley, a place for the existentialists and the masters of Zen. They coexist in tranquility as they would in an afterlife; they drift in space as insubstantial ghosts do, and parlay their differences without rancor.

We still try to understand and look for truth. But without the same urgency. Paradoxically, our quest has become academic though we are long out of the academy. Urgency now is reserved for ourselves. In the midst of life, our children, husbands, work, money, aging parents, and shall we take lovers are the daily ontological quandaries. What a falling-off, from that grand fire of Heraclitus that sparked the universe, to our small fires within. And yet to demean the personal is a form of sophistry (Professor Boles was harsh on sophistry), as well as a form of self-deprecation, feminists say. In any event, what we discuss with fervor today is our lives, their inner workings. This is a tedious sort of fascination, a fascinating sort of tedium. A casuist's labor. When we have thoroughly dissected our aberrations from some Platonic Idea of ourselves, parsed our neuroses, we move on to a more pragmatic question, just as Greek philosophy, Professor Boles tidily summed up, moved from scientific to epistemological to ethical: What do we know, How do we know it, and What are we going to do about it? What are we going to do about our own perversities? Ignore them where possible? Exorcise them? The patients of the better sort of doctors come away not so much purged as mellowed. Esther had herself analyzed. It did not change her noticeably but maybe she finds life and herself easier to tolerate. Shall we accept them, even love them? Surely if we can be exhorted to love our neighbors and love our enemies, we can attempt to love ourselves. Or shall we exploit them for professional advantage, like politicians and military men, high-class whores and artists?

On the topic of friendship, Aristotle says, "It is well not to seek to have as many friends as possible, but as many as are enough for the purposes of living together." We were a family of sorts, a family of sophomores, sophomoric. We switched the roles of parents and children, depending on the need. After studying alone till eleven or eleven-thirty, we gathered in Nina's and Esther's second-floor dormitory room with the beige institutional curtains and brown bedspreads on the twin beds. Esther and I were the restless ones, changing our places nightly—the beds, the floor, the windowsill. Nina and Gabrielle were always, reliably, where they were. Gabrielle sat on the new amber shag rug that was losing its glow from absorbing Esther's cigarette ash. She would have preferred a bare floor but she made do. Long-legged, hard-muscled, and pony-tailed, Gaby did warm-ups in second position, flexing and pointing her bare feet, widening nightly the angle between her thighs till by graduation it was close to a hundred eighty degrees. In our freshman year she had directed a modern-dance performance illustrating the myth of Prometheus. That was how we became friends. We were in the corps, cavorting after her as she leaped magnificently across the gym, a living torch, even her flying hair one of the deeper shades of flame.

Nina took the single armchair, rust-colored. She fit in it best, neatly combed and neatly dressed in tweed skirts and nylon stockings that she didn't remove till bedtime. She always looked impeccably like a lady. Her oval face, with its straight, clean features, was never shiny; her dark hair never escaped its pins. Everything about her face and body was fine and understated, so that later, when she deliberately cultivated glamor, it was like adorning a neutral base. I didn't room with Nina, so I never saw her in morning disarray. But even in the required swimming course she remained herself, tall, slender, and composed in the regulation tank suit which made the rest of us anonymous. Our lockers were adjacent; as she undressed she folded away every light and clean undergarment. She never complained about menstruation, as everyone else in swimming sooner or later did; there was never a sign of it; she was unspotted and strove to believe the world was likewise. The years to come would unravel her beliefs and blot her purity, but leave her ladyhood intact.

Earth, water, air, fire, Professor Boles told us the first day of The History of Philosophy 101. The story began simply. The second week they were all three out with flu. I was delegated to take good notes and report back without fail, as if the course were a serialized detective story. I went to the sickroom around midnight, fixed them tea and handed around the notes. Esther and Nina huddled under blankets, Nina in a bathrobe for once.

"She's still wearing that gray tweed suit but she changed the blouse. And her hair wasn't so wild today, and she had lipstick on. Maybe she was going out to lunch. The best thing she said isn't even in the notes. You know how she tosses out these little gems? It's not really philosophy, I guess. Thales, the one who said everything was water, also figured out how to measure the height of a pyramid. If you were ancient Greeks and had to measure the height of a pyramid, what would you do?" Silence. I crossed the room and paused a moment, for suspense. "He waited until that time of day when a man's shadow became equal to his height. Then he measured the shadow of the pyramid."

They didn't seem very interested.

"Actually," said Nina, "he could have measured a man's shadow at any time of day and then applied whatever proportion he found to the pyramid."

"God, she's so smart," said Esther despairingly from her bed. It was true, Nina was extremely smart. I cer-

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tainly would not have thought of that. Did Thales? And yet it did not have the same poetic rightness.

"For some reason," I said, "that little story fills me with wonder. Why is that?"

"Because," said Gabrielle. She was lying on the floor groaning with muscle aches but flexing and pointing her feet so as not to waste time. "Because it's based simply on the measure of a man. Or it could be a woman just as easily. From the size and scope of one human body you can discover immense secrets of the universe. That's what you like, Lydia. Your pride likes it." Gaby had an odd and rare feature—one blue eye and one green eye. Most of the time there was only a shade of difference, but at moments of strong emotion or insight they flared up, each gleaming its own color. I used to stare, and then I got used to it.

Earth, water, air, fire. The way up and the way down. I remember all about Heraclitus though I haven't much memory for ideas. I do have an ear for sound. I remember Nina's and Esther's voices playing counterpoint, a canon of repetition in shifting keys. Nina's was clear and subdued, with a narrow range that dipped lower when she got irritated—one of the few visible signs. She also blinked when she was disturbed, and smiled. Esther's voice was deeper and coarser, with an alluring crack in it, like some magisterial old woman who has smoked all her life. And Esther's voice had amazing degrees of expression; it could travel from its natural deep tone right up the scale through a series of querulous, astonished, indignant, and facetious notes, and she hit every one of them, every night.

Nina: "Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things." That's what Heraclitus says.

Esther: Big deal. So what else is new?

Nina: Now, the basic principle of reality is change. One element slides into another. Earth, water, air, fire. Fire starts in the sun, then becomes smoke, vapors, clouds, mist, rain, earth, rock. A gradual hardening. That's "the way down." Do you see?

Esther: The way down. Righto.

Nina: Then you have the way up. It goes in the

opposite direction, a melting instead of a hardening. Rock, earth, dew, mist, rain, clouds, vapors, smoke, fire.

Esther: Rock, paper, scissors. Scissors cuts paper, paper covers rock, rock breaks scissors.

Nina (her voice getting lower and very calm): Do you want to learn this or not?

Gabrielle (from the floor, flexing and pointing, her book open between her spread legs): Leave her be. That's her way of connecting. I do the same thing myself.

Nina: But you got ninety-two on the last quiz and she got sixty-two. The way up and the way down are going on eternally and at the same time, Esther, do you get it? There's a rhythm in their opposition. The two main features of the way up and the way down are continuity and reversibility. She'll definitely ask that next time. And the principle, remember, is change. "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed."

Esther: But is that true?

(That worried me too, silent in a corner with my book. *Everything* gives way? *Nothing* stays fixed?)

Nina: That's not the point. Repeat to me, now, about the way up and the way down.

Esther: Continuity. Reversibility. Earth to water to air to fire and vice versa. Listen, I'm not dumb. I can remember. I want to know if it's real.

Nina: First pass the test. Then you can worry about whether it's real. That was very good. Also remember about strife. "All things come to pass through the compulsion of strife." He means strife between the way up and the way down.

Esther (grabbing the book from her): "Fire lives in the death of earth, air in the death of fire, water in the death of air, and earth in the death of water." That is pretty grim. Everything lives through something else's death? I don't think I like that.

Nina (ever calm): It's not a hostile sort of strife. It's an objective description of a cycle. Nature is that process. But I do think he had a preference. I think he liked the way up better. He says, "A dry soul is wisest and best."

Esther: You ought to know.

Nina was hurt. She was doing her best to save Esther from failure. Back home in Indiana, if Nina had failed a test she would have been sent to bed without her supper for a week. Back home in Indiana, her duty was to excel, to obey, and to agree. Independent inquiry was rude and criticism was morally suspect. She had attended Sunday school in starched dresses every Sunday of her childhood, and curtsied for visitors, and if they asked how she was, was expected to reply, "Fine and dandy, just like sugar candy." By the age of four she was trained to pick up all her toys and put them away each evening, and then her mother would supervise her prayers, said aloud, kneeling alongside her bed. She became a math and science whiz kid; she could remember anything schematic. Admissions offices wooed her. Though we tried to take her in hand, Nina could not help behaving, the first couple of years, as though she were a houseguest of the college, too well-bred to question any of her hostess's offerings. And when she felt she had failed to meet anyone's highest expectations, she developed a slight stammer, which gave me a pang in my heart. It still does, though she has long ceased to blink and to smile, and has even learned to leave her living room strewn for days at a stretch. It was when she discovered passion that the careful surface

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began to alter: her parents had never shown or alluded to sexual passion, and so she thought adults, having outgrown the vagaries of childhood, were guided by reason.

We sat up late, talking of how we ought to spend our lives. Gabrielle aspired to Martha Graham's company. A few Saturday afternoons she had urged me downtown to see Martha Graham as a violent Greek heroine or a goddess, swathed in fabrics that possessed a life of their own. Gabrielle said that with enough work she could bridge the gap between flesh and spirit, and we all nodded admiringly. One night I saw her toss down her copy of *Père Goriot* (in French!) and scrutinize her body in the full-length mirror on the closet door. *"À nous deux, maintenant!"* she muttered. She would master it by force of will. What was flesh, what was spirit, and what was the nature of the gap, if indeed there is one, she didn't say, and no one thought to ask.

Nina wanted a happy home life: happy children, happy husband, happy happy. I found that sickening. "Talk about received ideas! If you've never seen the ocean you think a lake is the greatest thing there is. I mean, who knows, you might find more happiness being . . . oh, a madam in a brothel. It might do you good." I had just read *Mrs. Warren's Profession.*

"But why on earth would I want to be that?" she gasped.

"Especially with a degree from here," Esther added.

"I would say that's a puddle." Gabrielle stood up to attempt a slow backbend. Her long fingers reached down for the rug behind her.

"The point is to make it new," I snapped at them. I was reading Ezra Pound.

"That is true about the ocean, though." Esther opened a box of Lorna Doones wistfully. "I remember the first time I ever saw the ocean, last year. And I had seen pretty big lakes. The Great Lakes, you know, are not exactly ponds. But still. It was at Coney Island. I met this guy Ralph at a freshman mixer. I didn't like him that much and he was an inch shorter than I was, but I was lonesome. He came from New York and knew his way around. He had—"

"Esther, we're in the middle of something." Gaby made it to the floor—a high arc, a strip of olive-skinned concave middle exposed between sweatshirt and tights. In a strained voice she asked, "Is this going to be another saga of masochism?"

"No, no. I just must tell you. . . . It's not all that irrelevant—we're talking about what we want most. He had a car, and he asked me what I would most like to see in New York City, and I said, The ocean. He laughed when he heard I'd never seen it. He had a nice laugh, sort of a low chuckle. His face improved when he laughed. When he wasn't laughing it was very square and bony. Anyhow, he said it was especially beautiful in the fall, and the water was still warm from summer—you could dip your feet in. So, he told me to meet him the next Sunday afternoon at Alma Mater and he would take me. I didn't even know what Alma Mater was but I figured I'd find out by Sunday—I didn't want to sound completely . . . you know. Well, Sunday came, and I waited at that goddamn statue for an hour. I was so furious I kicked it. It was cold, too, not one of those gorgeous fall days when you'd want to get your feet wet. After fifteen minutes I was ready to leave. I mean, who did he think he was? Then I thought maybe something happened and I ought to give him a chance. Can you believe that for forty-five minutes I stood there debating with myself, Should I stay or should I go? I do have some pride, but on the other hand I really wanted to see the ocean. Well. Just as I was about to leave, his little form trotted onto the horizon. What had happened was . . ."

The ocean made it all worthwhile. Esther got her feet wet. They ate hot dogs, rode the carousel, seized the brass rings, shivered on the boardwalk, necked in the car. She caught a cold. He phoned several times but she refused him since she hadn't liked him very much in the first place.

"Did you know there's a club, the Polar Bear Club, of people who swim all year round? While we were freezing on the beach this troop of people, mostly old, I mean middle-aged, forty, fifty, came running past us and raced into the water. They splashed around for a couple of minutes and then raced out. He told me it was the Polar Bear Club. Can you imagine? It couldn't have been much more than forty-five degrees."

We talked about what we would change in the world, if we had the power. Stupidity, I said. And chaos. Her parents and her legs, said Esther. In general she would prefer to be a Modigliani rather than a Rubens. Nina said timidly that she would not keep Richard Nixon as Vice-President. There was something about his face she didn't trust.

And what we feared most. Our fears are touching, like old family photos of our grandparents as babies, swaddled in lace gowns and bonnets, overstuffed, innocent of life and death, and absurd: sexual frigidity, being locked in a closet with mice, mental stagnation, childbirth, failure, public humiliation. Today I would gladly suffer public humiliation if in return I could change the course of one specific afternoon. Any of the other things too. Even the mice.

"I can't believe it! I really can't believe it!" Esther stomped through the room in her blue baby-doll pajamas, flapping her notebook around. She had the soft, pink-tinged skin of a strawberry blonde, and she was flushed with vexation. "First they say everything is in constant flux. The basic principle is change. 'Everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.' Remember? So okay, I figure I'll have to live with that. And now they say that nothing ever changes? Everything is fixed? Never began, never will end? An arrow can't even hit its target? What kind of nonsense is that?"

The Eleatic school, very uncharming. "What is unthinkable is untrue." "Movement is impossible." Parmenides and his henchman Zeno poured reason like molten lead into the veins and arteries of the universe, and the system stiffened into paralysis.

"You're not supposed to take it literally," Gabrielle told her. "It's just another phase. The other ones were

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poetic, these are intellectual. They're trying to think clearly."

"But why would anyone want to think such things? Look, are you going to deny what you see with your own eyes? Can I or can I not walk across this room?" She demonstrated, stepping over Gaby.

"Not in the abstract, you can't," Nina said. "Between one step and the next is an infinity of little steps. You can't get through infinity."

"Are you trying to tell me you believe this garbage?"

"Well, uh, I wouldn't say I believe it in the sense you mean, no. But I do, uh, understand it," Nina stammered. She could be imperious drilling Esther by rote. When it came to defending a position, she had to blink a lot. "It has to do with a kind of relentless thinking, Esther. Carrying something to the very end, like a clue in a mystery, even if you don't like where it leads. It's more honest that way. It seems to me, at least." She cleared her throat and recrossed her legs.

Esther stared out the window at the November rain; she was silenced, braiding the fringes of the beige curtains. She rarely carried any clue to the very end. "I'm cold," she said finally. "Where's my bathrobe?"

"I put it in the wash. I was doing my own things and I thought you wouldn't mind," said Nina.

"I don't. Thanks. But it doesn't help the fact that I'm cold. Unlike some people, my body temperature moves, hot to cold, cold to hot."

"Close the window, then, and wear mine."

A truly Christian gesture, seeing that Esther was such a slob. She grew up with three generations of messy, uncommunicative family living under one creaking, leaking roof in Chicago. "You bourgeois types wouldn't believe them!" she told us condescendingly, and we couldn't. There were a senile maternal grandmother, an incontinent paternal grandfather, aunts and uncles who dropped in and out, besides her parents and three older brothers. Like a commune? Gaby suggested. No, no, not at all like a commune. No Brook Farm. No principles. Just a collection of people, barely a family. There were vague investments they shared; living under one roof made the money go farther.

Esther's people, as she called them, took their own meals at odd hours, nodded vague greetings in the halls, and lived for the most part in pajamas. There were cats, her mother's. "Her warmest feelings were reserved for the cats. She held them all the time. Me, never." It was like a poorly run hotel, she said, no one minding the front desk. "And I. I was an afterthought. An accident, I mean. I'm sure they weren't still doing it. He probably fell on her in his sleep, or something like that. I was a grown man's wet dream."

Her father didn't talk much to his children, but he would sometimes warn her brothers against the corruptions of capitalist success. (Not much danger of that, Esther noted with relish. One was in the army and one worked as a garage mechanic. The third built sculpture out of debris.) "My father was a leftist when he was young. An organizer." A twinge of pride seeped through, like light through a slit in a curtain. "He got disgusted, I guess, in the thirties when the war came. He gave it up." When, wearing her baby-doll pajamas, she ran into him in the kitchen at midnight, both in search of leftovers and surprising the water beetles into a frantic scurrying, he hardly gave her a glance. "But he shared the food. You've got to give the devil his due. Anything he found, he gave me half. Each according to his needs, you know."

On warm days, atavistically, Esther might wear bedroom slippers to class if she could get them past Nina. It was Nina who reminded her diplomatically to get her shoes reheeled, to hang up her skirts so they didn't crease, to buy new bras when the old ones lost their shape. Nina was uncomfortable seeing large breasts flop around. Perhaps she reminded her about taking showers too: whenever I met Esther ambling down the hall in her ancient green flannel robe, a wet towel slung over her shoulder, pinkish skin aglow and golden curls dripping, she would announce with a certain belligerent pride, "I just took a shower," as if I couldn't tell, or needed to know for the record.

"I am a product of will over chaos," she declared every so often. "How else do you think I got here?" Leafing through a *Guide to American Colleges and Universities*, she had liked the sound of the small women's college abutting the great university, and she liked the distance between New York and Chicago. After a few bitter remarks about private education under capitalism, her father agreed to pay the bills, though he considered the venture pointless. "If you think you can find a better husband there than here, be my guest."

"That wasn't so bad. That I could take. It was my mother who nearly did me in. 'New York! My, my. Do you really think you can manage? I wonder who looks after you girls.' Looks after! I don't think she looked after me from the first morning she deposited me at kindergarten. 'But if you feel you must, dear, I certainly wouldn't stand in your way.' Stand in my way! She wouldn't stand, period. She was always lying down. Reclining, you know, on one of those old-fashioned chaises, sort of like Mme. de Staël awaiting her guests. She took naps on and off all day long and never bothered to comb her hair when she got up. She would powder her face, though. She was overpowdered. She had a powdery look, you know what I mean? Like you had an urge to sort of dust her off." Esther could keep us laughing, but it was unwilling laughter. I hoped she was exaggerating. "'Be sure to take good care of yourself out there, Essie. The change of air. . . . You were such a delicate little thing when you were a baby.' Nine pounds four ounces. Delicate! And she only nursed me for two weeks. Two goddamn weeks. She said I bit. She said I was born with teeth. 'Remember, if you don't like it you can always get on a plane and come back home.' Home! Sure, so I could join her and we could rot together. Of course she wanted me home—who else would do the shopping and cooking, such as it was."

"Esther, I didn't know you could cook."

"Will over chaos." She ripped open a sample pack of cigarettes. "I'd be happy never to see a pot again for the rest of my life. The kitchen positively reeked of cats, the garbage piled with all those open cans. I tried, believe me. But you can't get rid of that smell. It's an indestructi-

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ble smell. No one else seemed to smell it except me—they were inured." Nina shuddered. She loathed cats, like her mother before her. "Well, anyway, then she would turn back to her needlepoint. Discussion of my education is finished. She was always doing needlepoint: cats, horses, zebras—she hung them all over her bedroom. Her big excursions were going out to the needlepoint shop. She'd get all dressed, and powdered, naturally, and put on this dark green coat with little foxes' tails hanging from the collar that made her look like something in those cases at the Museum of Natural History. She would come home all atwitter with a new piece of burlap or whatever the hell it is. Take a plane home! I would rather have died than gone home. Do you remember—well, I guess you wouldn't; I hardly knew you all then, except Nina—that first semester I spent three weeks in the infirmary? Everyone thought I had mono, I had all the right symptoms. But I think I was having some kind of collapse. I wouldn't let them call home. I threatened to hang myself if they did. But they made me compromise. I would call my mother and say I wasn't feeling too well and just sort of chat, so Dr. Peters wouldn't be in any trouble, I guess in case I died or something. Peters must have listened in on the extension, because after that she didn't bother me any more about calling. She gave me pills."

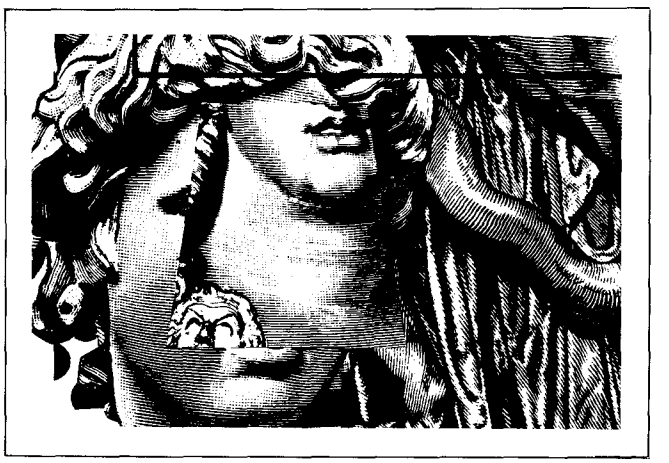
"But why was your mother like that?" Gaby asked. "What happened to her?"

Esther was surprised by the question. "I don't know that anything special happened to her. That was how she was. I never really thought much about why." She shrugged and lit another sample cigarette. "Her sister was like that, her mother, maybe I'll get that way too. Maybe it's in the genes."

It was Nina's and Esther's room we gathered in because my roommate had to go to bed at eleven-thirty; she claimed her brain cells could not function on fewer than eight hours of sleep. Until eleven-thirty she sat hunched over her desk in her flowered flannel pajamas with feet, like Dr. Dentons, winding her lank brown hair around her fingers and squinting over thick biology textbooks whose colorful diagrams of inner organs were unsettling. Particularly unsettling was the female sexual and reproductive system, viewed in profile section. To me it was a woman bisected vertically. I have seen that profile many times since, in gynecologists' offices and in those booklets that explain sex and menstruation to little girls, and still it appears so remote from what some writer called felt life.

My roommate, who came from Denver, ate bananas while she studied. In her open, easy accents, she told me the virtues of potassium. Like me, Melanie was always hungry and always slim. She let the peels pile up on her desk, so that the studious evenings unwound in a sensuous banana aroma, like incense. Mornings brought the bittersweet smell of rot. To offset the banana peels I ate oranges, the large, thick-skinned kind. Orange peels left out overnight do not stink. But sometimes I ate the peels as well. The fleshy white part kept some of the sweetness of the pulp; the closer I got to the outside, the more tart. I loved the bumpy texture but I took very small bites because of the acid. Melanie never thought this slow, luxurious nibbling at the rinds was at all peculiar. She also never seemed to mind my turning on the light in the middle of the night, if I chanced to awaken and panic at the dark.

We were not together in the room very much: for hours every day I used a piano practice room on campus, while she peered into a microscope. Weekends I went to free concerts or lay on my bed reading, eating oranges and an occasional banana; she was out with her boyfriend. Each May we chose to room together again. After graduation we said good-bye warmly, embracing through our identical commencement robes. I think it was the only time we touched. She still sends me Christmas cards from Maryland, where she is a professor of gastroenterology at Johns Hopkins. From Melanie I learned about coexistence, and since then, when Victor and I have had bad spells, thwarting each other's groping efforts at contact, I have suggested that we try simply to coexist till things improve. I envision us like Melanie and me, for four years sleeping, eating fruit, working, dressing and undressing, demanding little, feeling the mild good will which Aristotle says does not involve intensity or desire yet is a kind of inactive friendship: the parties wish each other well but would not go out of their way to do anything for each other. Victor has no interest in coexistence, though. Victor wants all or nothing.



Gabrielle's roommate was quite a different matter. An anachronism, years ahead of her time, Steffie Baum slept guiltlessly with the boys across the street. She even stayed out overnight. Apparently a network of Columbia students rented some cheap apartments nearby for their rendezvous, and worked out careful schedules, but I knew nothing yet of the details. Steffie was a small, curvy girl with a pretty face and large, unapologetic blue eyes that could hold a steady gaze longer than anyone else's; Steffie was never the one to avert her eyes first. Her other impressive feature was her hair, satiny and long enough to sit on. She changed its arrangement each day as if to demonstrate her infinite variety: loose and flowing, a tight bun, two braids resting on her bosom. Whatever the hairdo, she moved through the dormitory halls and in and out of the shower with an enviable easy languor. We

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assumed this easy languor came from the carnal knowledge we lacked. We may have mixed up cause and effect.

(Technically I didn't lack it. There had been a boy in high school who pushed his way through once, quickly, in the dark. He offered me a challenge and I accepted, to show I was afraid of nothing, at fifteen. But in spirit I was still virginal. I hadn't felt much except shock at my own daring.)

Steffie was the sort who could do everything well and remain likable. She got excellent grades (a history major), though she cut classes to the legal limit. She sang in the Gilbert and Sullivan Society. She wrote for the school paper. The year she did theatre reviews she asked friends along on her pair of press seats. I got to see *The Threepenny Opera* and studied the musicians while Steffie took notes with a little pen that had a flashlight on top. She tried to organize a tutoring program for children in the slums bordering the college, and when her recruiting failed, since it was hardly an era of activism, she tutored on her own. And yet with all this, she managed to tiptoe down the corridors long after signing in for the night. In sneakers and ponytail she looked like a runaway child, a bag over her shoulder containing a toothbrush and comb, the next morning's books, and a nightgown—she didn't wear pajamas like the rest of us. Some boy had taught her how to unlock the door to the emergency exit with a pair of pliers so the bell wouldn't ring. We shook our heads with worry. She was never caught, though, and for that we called her lucky.

She might have been one of us, but we kept her just outside our inner circle. That world would claim us all too soon. We deferred it. It was not an era of voluptuousness, either; it was the late fifties, a quiescent time. Except when Steffie appeared mornings after, unchanged, efficient and alert in class, I felt a bit of a fool. I was always competitive, and the sight of her gave me a vague physical unrest.

"Aha! So there is change after all! Everything is not so static. I knew it. I knew it," Esther cried in triumph. It was nearing Thanksgiving and, fittingly, we had reached the Pluralists: Empedocles, mystical poet, Professor Boles announced, as if he were about to enter from the wings. And Anaxagoras, prosaic man of science. Thank goodness they happened along—Parmenides had brought matters to a dead end with his fixed and eternal universe. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.* Nothing can come of nothing, she quoted. Speak again. And these two spoke, clearing a middle path. All was not constant change, they concurred. But nor was all immutable. Beneath the undeniable evidence of change was something enduring, something that abided. No power could take it *all* away. A vast relief eased through me as Professor Boles unraveled the plot, grinning like a master detective, her wild gray hair afloat.

Back to the beginnings again: earth, water, air, fire. But not as simply as before. The four elements are the roots—and how we loved that word, roots; it gave us a sense of getting intimate with truth. Every mortal thing is made of the immortal elements in diverse combinations. An intricate dance, the four roots forever mingling and separating, cleaving and riving, world without end. And what propels this fantastic parade? Ah, Empedocles, what a romantic. Love and Strife. Love joins together, Strife axes apart. "And I shall tell you something more." Oh yes, Empedocles, by all means speak again. "There is no birth in mortal things, and no end in ruinous death. There is only mingling and interchange of parts, and it is this that we call 'nature.'"

And as if this were not enough, Anaxagoras, prosaic man of science though he was, went him one better. Not Love and Strife, but Mind "took charge of the cosmic situation. . . . Mind set in order all that was to be, all that ever was but no longer is, and all that is now or ever will be." That suited me fine. No death, and Mind in charge.

Nina did not share my relief. "It's not any ultimate truth. It's only part of an ideological sequence, and naturally it gets a little more sophisticated as it goes along." She paused to light her weekly cigarette. "All of this has been completely superseded by modern science, of course. It's only of interest historically, and maybe poetically."

I wanted to protest but I didn't know how. Nina was admittedly the smart one, and already she was stammering less.

"I'm not so sure they've been superseded," said Esther. "Look, Anaxagoras says there's a little bit of everything in everything else. Black and white have the seeds of gray. Food has the seeds of the blood and bone it's going to help make. That's pretty clever. It's not so different from your periodic table of ninety-two elements or however many there are. Everything starts from—"

A neighboring door snapped brusquely shut. Loud, ponderous footsteps.

"Oh-oh, the witching hour," Esther moaned. "Honestly, we ought to make a scarecrow some night, just to make Mrs. Ramsey's job more exciting. She hardly ever gets the thrill of discovery."

The college had lately adopted the progressive policy of allowing males—presumably the boys from across the street—to visit in the dormitory rooms till midnight Thursdays through Saturdays, provided the doors were kept ajar. This was an advance over the former policy of allowing males only in the small ground-floor rooms known as beau parlors and equipped with floral-upholstered sofas, provided, again, that the doors were kept ajar and all four feet remained on the floor. (Nothing specific about feet was enjoined in the new rule.) For enforcement, Mrs. Ramsey, a short squat woman, made the rounds at midnight in her tight black rayon uniform and black oxfords. Mrs. Ramsey was wasted on us: her face was so impassive that she might have policed on a much grander scale, in a sheikhdom, a sultanate. Fortunately for some, her heavy tread gave a few seconds' notice. She granted a warning knock before flinging doors wide. I wondered if anything could jar that face—a naked male, maybe with an erection, maybe inserting it into willing flesh . . .

"Hi there, Mrs. Ramsey," Esther called brightly, springing from the bed. "Not a thing here to worry about! See?" She yanked open the door of the closet. One half

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was an orderly array of dark smooth clothes obediently on their hangers; the other a jumble of stripes, prints, peasant skirts swirling into each other, shoes heaped on the floor like abandoned auto parts, a green slicker painfully lopsided on a hook that pierced its shoulder, two enormous straw hats sliding from the top shelf. Esther dashed back to lift the bottom of the bedspread, inviting Mrs. Ramsey to have a peek, but the woman, unfazed, had turned to go. Maybe beneath her face she was contemptuous. Her toneless words trailed after her: "Please keep the noise down." Esther leaned out the open door and called down the hall, *"Cherchez l'homme!"*

"Listen, listen to this." Gabrielle had been reading all the while. She would not object to such antics, nor would she take part. "Empedocles says some wonderful things. This is very *à propos:* 'It is in the warm parts of the womb that males are born; which is the reason why men tend to be dark, hairy, and more rugged.'"

"I guess that has been superseded by modern science," I said, and Nina smiled faintly.

"'Abstain entirely from laurel leaves,'" Gabrielle read on. "Oh, and this one is very passionate: 'Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands away from beans.' I wonder why. Oh dear." She sighed and fluffed out her long hair, just washed and drying at the open window.

"What's the matter?"

"'I wept and mourned when I discovered myself in this unfamiliar land.'"

She looked up, her eyes filled with tears. She had been brought to this strange land as a child of five. Her parents were French, her father in the diplomatic corps. Could a small child really feel that kind of pain? Or could she summon tears for Empedocles?

"That's how I felt," said Esther, "when I came to New York, even though I was glad to leave home. That's why I went to see the ocean with a boy I didn't even like and let him paw me. I was so lonesome. That's why I got mono, or whatever that sickness was, and the only thing that kept me here was imagining the satisfaction on my mother's face if I gave up and went home."

"So you're glad you stayed?" asked Nina.

Esther looked around at all of us. "Now? Sure! Sure I'm glad I stayed. I'm fine now."

We all went home for Thanksgiving, and on the first day back Nina tucked in the lower right-hand corner of her mirror, the place where some girls kept photographs of their boyfriends or families, a three-by-five card. On it, typed, were the questions that members of the sixth-century B.C. Pythagorean Brotherhood asked in their daily examinations of conscience: In what have I failed? What good have I done? What have I not done that I ought to have done?

"What is that supposed to be, a mother substitute?" Esther demanded.

Nina smiled. She rarely tried to justify herself.

"You told *us* we took it too personally," I reminded her.

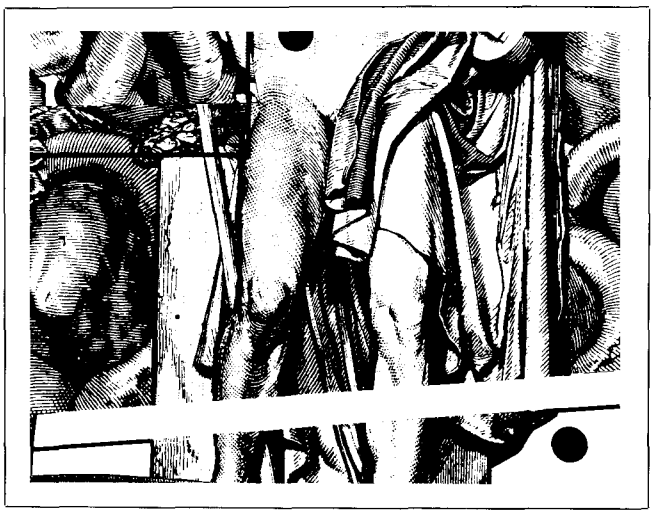
She smiled.

We pointed out that the card was inconsistent in spirit with what was ranged on the dresser top just below it: Revlon Touch & Glow liquid make-up, Jean Naté spray cologne, Nivea cream, Cutex colorless nail polish, an ashtray with tortoiseshell barrettes for her mass of black hair, perpetually bridled, silver-handled hairbrush, five lipsticks. She accepted our teasing and said, "It may be best to stay in balance by keeping one foot in the real world and one foot in the ideal."

"And who said that?" Esther wanted to know.

"No one." She smiled in earnest this time. "I made it up."

On the three mornings we had The History of Philosophy we would meet downstairs at a quarter to nine and walk over together. Nina began not appearing. "She was already gone when I woke up," Esther reported. "That's odd, isn't it?" She would greet us in class, composed as ever, maybe a bit quieter than usual. Since Nina was not the kind you could interrogate, Gabrielle, the ever-resourceful, undertook some research. The Pythagorean Brotherhood, she learned, followed a moral and mystical regimen for purifying the soul and attaining wisdom. "'They performed their morning walks alone and in places where there was appropriate solitude and quiet; for they considered it contrary to wisdom to enter into conversation with another person until they had rendered their own souls calm and their minds harmonious. It is turbulent behavior, they believed, to mingle with a crowd immediately on arising from sleep,'" she read to me. "Is that what we are, a crowd?" We were wounded.



"She's probably working on her memory, too. Listen to this. 'To strengthen their memory the students began each day, on first waking up, by recollecting in order the actions and events of the day before; after that they tried to do the same for the preceding day, and so on backwards as far as they could go, taking care to make the order of recollection correspond with the order in which the events had actually occurred. For they believed that there is nothing more important for science, and for experience and wisdom, than the ability to remember.'"

I tried it for three days and gave up. I could remember many things, but not in the order in which they occurred. They regrouped themselves in thematic patterns like

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music, as if memory were coaxing life to make more structural sense than it possibly could.

"Do you really do it?" I asked Nina, alone.

She nodded. "It helps keep things in order."

"I thought you had things in very good order."

"Oh no, Lydia. Inside is all turmoil." Her face was troubled. Unblinking and unsmiling, it seemed to cover webs of complexity. But I couldn't press her further. The others were about to join us; we were having a Chinese dinner on Broadway to celebrate Nina's nineteenth birthday.

The Pre-Socratics were superseded. Only in poetry did they remain unsurpassed. Earth, water, air, and fire. The way up and the way down, eternal and reversible. Professor Boles confessed she had lingered too long under their spell; now we must move more swiftly. Past Plato and Aristotle and the medieval schoolmen. The weather grew cold as we progressed in a northwesterly direction to encounter three Continental Rationalists, three British Empiricists, and three German Idealists. Cunning minds indeed, to have arranged themselves in geographical triads.

"I think, therefore I am?" It was just after Christmas vacation and Esther, fresh from the homestead in Chicago, was in a querulous mood. "I think, therefore I am? I don't get it. It doesn't sound authentic."

"But it's as simple as can be!" Gabrielle exclaimed. "He wants to start from scratch. How do you know you're there? Because someone is asking that question."

"Yes," said Esther, "I realize *that* much. But before I even ask the question—not that I personally would ever ask such a question, I have never had such high-class doubts. But all right, suppose I had. Before I would even hear that clever little voice asking that clever little question—God almighty, I feel, I touch, I smell, transitively, that is. I mean, thinking is a pretty advanced thing. If the guy wants to be primitive he's got a long way to go, if you ask me. Throw me one of those cigarettes over there, would you, Lydia?"

Among the chewed pencils, tangled beads, hairbrush crammed with shed gold hair, and crumpled paper on Esther's dresser top, were half a dozen open sample packs of cigarettes. I reached over and picked up a miniature blue box with white and yellow trim, containing six cigarettes. "Hit Parades. Hit Parades are the absolute worst, Esther." I tossed them over.

"I know." She shrugged. "But listen, they're free."

We didn't yet know about tar and nicotine. Once a week bland-faced young salesmen in business suits walked through the smoking section of the library offering free samples of atrocious new brands. Esther accepted them indiscriminately; when the young men pulled out their market-research questionnaires she responded that they were all terrible, but she would take another of each, thank you. She seemed always short of money, and practiced other small and arbitrary economies—denying herself a four-dollar scarf in winter, or a dollar movie at the Student Center. Her father provided a checking account, but she used it as little as possible. I imagine that self-denial made her feel closer to this father who barely acknowledged her existence and also warned her brothers against the corruptions of capitalism.

She lit up a Hit Parade and tossed the match, still aflame, across her bed into the heavy, mud-colored ashtray she had made in high school and brought with her all the way from Chicago. She was proud of it. She said it was the only decent thing she had ever made with her own two hands besides sandwiches and stews.

"Esther, someday you may set this place on fire. I worry when I get into bed and you're still smoking in the dark. I can see the little orange circle flashing around."

"Sorry." Esther leaned over to reach her ashtray and blew out the match; her breath sent up a black spray that drifted down to settle on the bedspread. "Oh well. Sorry again." She tried to brush off the ashes but they smudged. "Anyhow, there is one thing I like about Descartes. Here. 'To accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so . . . nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I would have no occasion to doubt it.' In other words, don't believe anything until you've proven it for yourself."

"Well . . . not exactly," said Nina. "Not in science. It would be absurd to start from scratch every time you devised an experiment. Some things we take on faith, from past research."

"Nothing on faith! Nothing on faith! Isn't that what it says right here? I don't believe there's an unconscious mind. I don't believe there's a God. I'm not even convinced there are little protons and electrons. Give me a microscope, let me see for myself."

"I'll vouch for them," said Nina. "Won't you take my word for it?"

"No. You believe what you've been told. Didn't you believe in heaven and hell for the first fifteen years of your life?"

"This sort of jejune discussion is not what Descartes had in mind," Gabrielle said severely from the floor. "Not what he had in mind at all."

"Jejune?" said Esther with a lively flick of her curls. "Jejune? Is that French?"

I also found the three Continental Rationalists disappointing, but I tucked in the right-hand corner of my mirror the sentence that most intrigued me: "The effort by which each thing endeavors to persevere in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself." Spinoza. I didn't really know what it meant, but I

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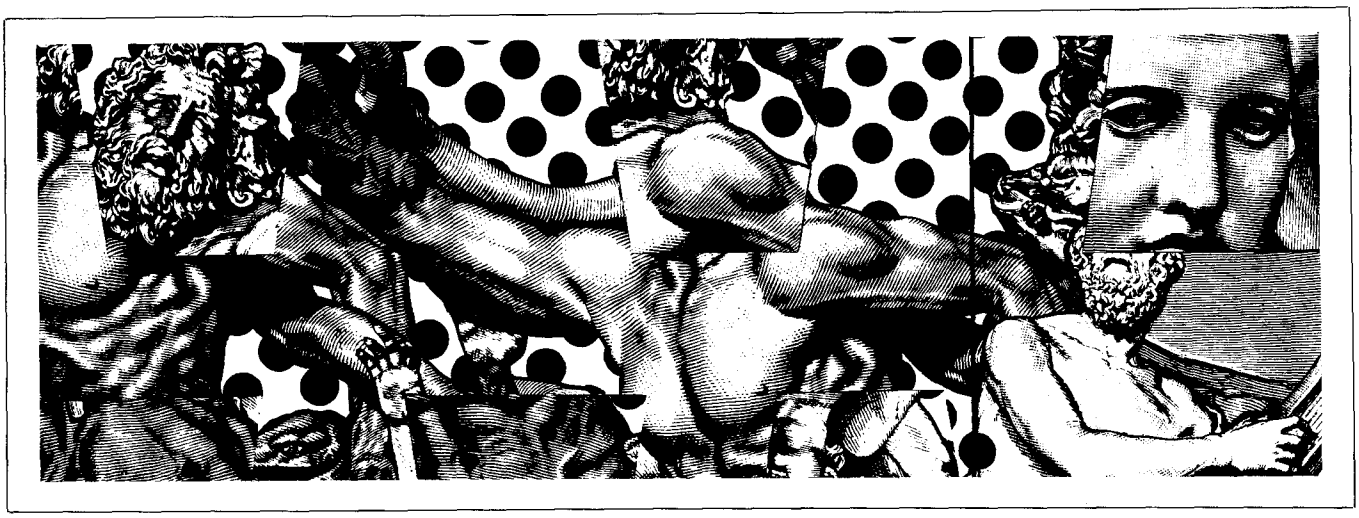

hoped that I would in time, and that it would be worth the wait.

Gabrielle, in a royal blue leotard and tights, sat with the soles of her feet touching, her class notes in the parallelogram formed by her legs. She was eating Pecan Sandies. Every few moments her long bare arm would extend mechanically up towards the bag on the windowsill. She rarely indulged that way, only when she was getting her period and craved sweets, but it was the night before the final exam. I was replaying Professor Boles's voice in my head; I heard tones and intervals, with words giving them boundaries and shape. The hard part was restoring meaning to the words. Nina's and Esther's duet was a distraction.

"Entelechy, Esther?"

She was smoking ravenously. "Entelechy. Each thing's essence moves from its potential to realization. Aristotle."

"Very good. What are the four ways? Or she may call it the four causes of a phenomenon. With an example."

"Material, formal, efficient, final. The example in the book is a house. But a house is so unoriginal. If she asks that I'm going to use something else. A shoe."

"Why not start with the house?" Nina cajoled. She was eating too. She had even kicked off her black pumps, and sat curled in her chair, the box of Mallomars on her lap.

"Such a conventional mind, Nina. It's a pity. Material cause: bricks. Or mud, as the case may be. Ice, for an igloo. Formal cause: plans or blueprints. Efficient cause: labor. Tote that barge, lift that bale. Final cause: someone needs a place to live."

"Very good!" Nina's eyes shone with pleasure. Her labor was paying off: Esther was being built. "Of course on the exam you'll leave out the asides."

"But the asides are my essence. Give me a Mallomar, would you? I'm thin this week. Now I will tell you about a shoe. Just to show I can do it on my own. Material cause: leather. More likely plastic, these days. Formal cause: design for a shoe, I suppose. Efficient cause: same thing, labor. No! Elves! Final cause: The foot wants a covering. Baby needs a new pair of shoes. Shall I go on? I could do more complex things. A nervous breakdown. A painting by Picasso. An orgasm. Hey, would you like me to do an orgasm? I've read all about it."

"There really isn't time," said Nina coolly. She licked chocolate off each finger. "I think we'd better go on to his ideas about friendship."

Gabrielle suddenly moaned in agony. I thought she must have pulled a muscle. "Oh, this stuff makes me so sick," she growled. She stood up in one spasm of motion, swishing her hair around, waving the sheaf of notes in her hand. Her voice spiraled; the mellow, sensible girl was left far behind. "Sick! A whole term of trash! I thought there'd be some connection with reality. But all this is nothing but classification. Three grades of faculties of the soul. Four kinds of law. Four cardinal virtues. Is that truth? It's some kind of mumbo-jumbo numerology! Five proofs of the existence of God. Oh sure, first you decide what you want to believe, then you invent the reasoning."

Her face glistened with sweat. She bolted through the room, a jagged path of bright blue, and flung open the window. A gust of air rushed in. With her wide, broad-shouldered stance, every bone and curve articulated in the leotard, hair blowing and head lifted high in indignation, she seemed at last the Martha Graham tragic heroine she longed to dance. Woman confronting the betrayal of the intellect. Her eyes were shadowed; I couldn't see their colors.

"That was wonderful." I applauded. *"Brava!"*

"I'm not fooling around, Lydia. We wasted so much time. Look, the so-called enlightened ones are no better." She riffled through her notes. "Hume. Such an original mind, she told us. But the same old thing—seven different categories of relationships. Would you like to hear them?"

"No!" Esther said. "And could you please stop running around the room? You're making me dizzy."

"Oh, all right." She dropped to the floor and breathed deeply. "Also those fallacies. They made up as many fallacies as truths." She was calmer; we were still transfixed. "Fallacy of ambiguity, fallacy of equivocation," she droned. "Fallacy of composition, fallacy of division—I can't even remember all the fallacies."

"Oh, come on," I said. "The fallacies are fun."

"Aha, speaking of fun—have you run across the

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Hedonistic Calculus, by any chance? Jeremy Bentham? I know it wasn't in the course but I happened upon it. The Hedonistic Calculus helps you choose between competing but mutually exclusive pleasures." She grabbed a book and leafed through. "I bet you didn't know there were seven ways to measure your pleasure."

"Gaby, really. Talk about jejune."

"I didn't make this up, Lydia. This is the product of a great mind. Number one. Intensity of the pleasure. Number two. Duration of the pleasure. Three. Certainty or uncertainty—that means how far the experience is guaranteed to deliver the pleasure." Her lips moved tentatively in a gamine kind of smile. The Greek Fury was giving way to a Gallic wit. "Four. Propinquity or remoteness—how close the pleasure is, in space as well as time. Five. This is a good one. Fecundity. How likely is it that the pleasure will lead to subsequent pleasures of the same sort?" She had us laughing, in relief as much as amusement. The impending test was forgotten. "Six. Purity—the absence of any little bits of pain mixed in. And seven. Extent. How far can the pleasure be shared with others?"

"Well," said Esther. "We could go out and share a pizza, at least."

The next morning Professor Boles, looking melancholy in her old gray tweeds, asked us to trace the successive phases of Pre-Socratic thought. I think she loved the Greeks and hated to see the semester over. Dutifully, sophomorically, I repeated vision after vision until I reached the mystical poet and the prosaic man of science, who reassured us that there is indeed movement (and with it possibility, and hope), and underneath, the eternal and the immutable. Something abides, I wrote to her in my blue book, like a personal letter, my heart in my pen. Those elemental roots—earth, water, air, fire. ("Good but too literal," she commented in red pencil. B plus.)

I was disappointed that there was no question remotely connected with how Thales measured the height of the pyramid. Even though Nina was right—Thales could have measured a man's shadow at any time of day and applied the shadow-man ratio to the pyramid—I found the appeal of the story lay in the waiting. I imagined him patient and serene, maybe eating cookies and talking to his friends, waiting for that ripe moment when an insubstantial shadow on the sand inches up to a human magnitude that can break down a pyramid's recalcitrance. But it was a no-nonsense exam.

"That was not really related to the course, Lydia," said Gabrielle. "Only of biographical interest. Are you taking the next semester?"

"Sure." I remembered her outburst of the night before. I would take it warily, not expecting truth but simply watching the mind flex and point. (I could never hold on to that correct attitude, though. Not then and not later.) I would devote my better energies to music. Practice more, learn the oboe too, and venture across the street, where the Eastern European professors were playing with computers and electronic equipment.

Naturally Nina was going to take the second semester. Esther also, to our surprise.

"*Mais certainement,*" she said. "I looked through the syllabus and the reading list. It says the world is all blind irrational striving. Someone's will and idea. I mean, even the titles are terrific. *Fear and Trembling? The Sickness unto Death?* Believe me, I'm going to do just fine." (She did. Professor Boles didn't know what came over her. How the tables were turned! In the glow of early May sunshine Esther would try to explain to Nina what Sartre meant by bad faith, and what he meant when he said, "We were never more free than during the German occupation." "How could they be?" Nina sat dulled with puzzlement. "Because they were close to the edge, stupid." Esther was not a patient tutor. "Because they were close to death. *Death,*" she whispered hoarsely. "Everything they did had to be real. No time for fooling around. They had to resist, Nina. Make their lives mean something.")

Meanwhile we sat in the West End Bar sharing a bottle of wine to celebrate the end. Nina said, "I thought it was a pretty easy exam. Did everyone answer that question about Aristotle? I mean the little optional one."

We had all answered the optional question about Aristotle on friendship. We grinned at each other across the table, suddenly shy.

"So what did we all say?" I asked.

"What did you say, Lydia?" Gabrielle's eyes shone blue and green, and she flashed her quizzical, wry look. At those moments I could swear she had the trace of an accent too, or maybe it was only an inflection of the voice. It still happens once in a while. The alien vowel, the sprung rhythm flickers by, almost between syllables, and vanishes.

"I? All right. I said that there are three kinds of friendship. The first two kinds, friendship based on utility and friendship based on pleasure, are transient, and endure only as long as the friend continues to be useful and pleasant." I was reciting Professor Boles's words from memory. "But the third type, which is perfect friendship, is a friendship between equals, and founded in goodness. Each person wishes good for the other just as she would for herself; in fact Aristotle says 'a friend is another self.' The principal virtue of friendship is loving, and since it is a mutual love of character rather than of any passing quality such as pleasure or usefulness, it endures a lifetime as character itself endures. Which is not to say," I concluded, and I poured wine slowly for all of us in turn, the way my father used to do at our Passover Seders with his teasing, maverick expression, "which is not to say that such friends cannot also be useful and pleasant, since whatever is enduringly good cannot be otherwise. I made it short, because after all, it was only worth five points out of the whole term's work."

We drank to it.

And then slightly drunk, for we were young girls not used to wine, we danced our way back to the dormitory, prodding the reluctant Nina. It was the fire-bearer dance Gaby had choreographed the year before for the Prometheus myth—live torches flaming up Broadway in winter's quick coming of dark.

And then, years later, they tell us that there has never been any such thing as friendship among women, only rivalry, and that it is time to attempt Sisterhood. Sisterhood. The word has a grating sound. A friend is another self. □

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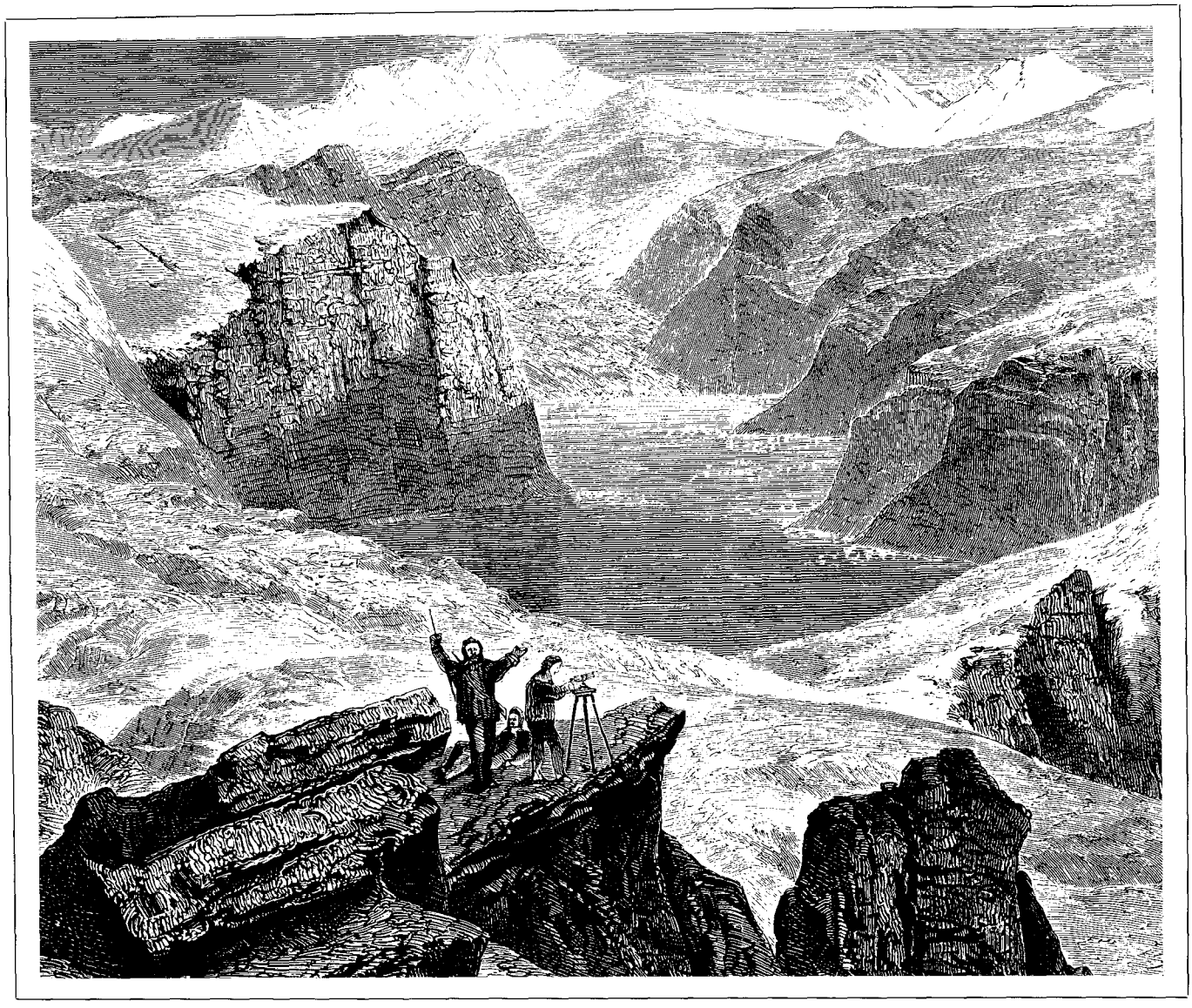
Jonathan Penner

Men Are of Three Kinds



My grandfather is valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear. No man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of. Nor any man an attaint but he carries some stain of it. Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*. He is seventy-six years old and many times a millionaire. He wears in Scarsdale what he wears in Florida, creamwhite shoes, trousers the shining lime of a sourball on the tongue. He is a man of action.

On the patio in Scarsdale he sits, always with people, always talking. By profession he is—still, at his age—a finder. What does he find? Companies! He makes a pharmaceutical midget enter the mouth of a chemical giant. He extracts from the emperor of ice cream the bride-price of a brewery. For this he earns commissions in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. We couldn't live his life for an hour.

In lime trousers and champagne shirt he sits on his patio, talking. We are visiting from Ohio, my father and I, after my college graduation. *What is this man?* Is there any Chairman of the Board he doesn't know, any necessary politician who never sat where I'm sitting now?

"I'm on the road next week," he says. "United Brands is going to buy Dubuque Beef. They don't know it yet." He will represent the Beef, a man his age who built the business, who was here a month ago sitting in my cast-iron chair. "United, those dopes. I offered them Bic Pens for four million. Procter and Gamble just bought it for eight times that."

Money! He lives for it, the deals he made and—even more—the ones he missed. "Martin," he tells my father, "you remember. Remember? I went to Inland Steel, I had American Chain and Cable in my pocket. Five years they'd have tripled their investment. Dopes!"

His man Hector drives us into the city the next morning. Grandfather needs to see his bankers, who are growing too conservative. My father, a historian, is attending a scholarly conference. I am going to the New York Public Library, to pace off the walls of alphabetized index cards,

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to smell the books somebody wrote now abandoned in millions, to see innumerable people who'd still be here if I closed my eyes.

When I return by train and cab, anesthetic with sensation, they are still awake, though my father just barely. His jowls swell against his neck, his eyes look stapled half-open. My grandfather's day has not been good. "A *kid* comes in," he says, "your age, Bobby, and tells me my client's credit's no good. I tell him, listen: you get out of that chair and go straight to Jack Bergen, who I've dealt with longer than you've been alive. You tell Jack if he's responsible for this attack of gutlessness, which I can't believe, he isn't killing me, he's killing himself."

We are sitting on the flagstone patio. No moon, no stars—why is it so light? At the far end of a woodchip path, lined by topiary camels whose lightbulb hearts shine faint blue, lies the great pool in its scalloped shell. It's heated. I can see the rising steam.

"I thought Jack Bergen had died," says my father, massaging his eyelids. "Last year. A stroke."

"Take a dip," my grandfather urges me. He and my father have already been. They are robed and toweled, drinking Scotch.

"Pull off your clothes right here," he says. "Show us what being young is like." I stand away in the dark. To the southwest, the sky is bottom-lit as though New York will clear the trees. "Good," my grandfather says, "very good," and naked I trot the woodchip path. Ahead of me the pool shimmers as cleaning tendrils dance blindly in its depth. In midleap I will live forever: this is promised to be mine.

"The human brain," my father says, "comprises roughly twelve billion neurons. That's in a young adult such as yourself."

It's winter break, and we are visiting my grandfather on Palm Key. But Hector was putting his suitcase into the car when we arrived. "Japan," said my grandfather, putting down his elephant-hide attaché case, immediately picking it up again. "Mitsubishi is going to buy Firestone. I forgot you were coming. Why don't you have Hector take you out for some fishing?"

"Each day," says my father, "a hundred thousand neurons die." We are sitting in the skylit Florida kitchen because, without my grandfather here, the other downstairs rooms are too big; they make us feel like burglars. "The brain shrinks." My father makes patting, squeezing gestures in midair, like a boy compacting a snowball. The telephone in the kitchen rings and is answered in some far part of the house.

He lowers his folded hands to the kitchen table. Across from him, I imitate his posture, an urge that I sometimes find irresistible. Emulation? Parody? I don't know! In a moment he will reach for his three-ring notebook and ballpoint pen, Ohio objects that look very strange here, and suggest we jot a few things down.

A man of reason. Each day he carries a list, prepared the night before, of things he must do. His calendar has blue-inked notes such as, on my birthday, "Robert b." Blue notes on the dates my mother was b, he and she were m, and she d. I can't believe I remember her, but there's a hand cream whose scent means that I do. Blue-inking his past into his future, while sipping one glass of still white wine, is his ceremony each New Year's Eve.

Hector appears, impressive in his thick shoulders and dark mustache. He points at my father, who picks up the kitchen phone. Then he hands my father what look like airline tickets. I can tell who it is because the shouting makes my father hold the phone away from his ear. "I will," he says. "Drink some water. Loosen your tie. It's all right."

In a minute a quieter voice comes on. "Yes, sir," says my father. He says that when I wish he wouldn't, to minority guys who think he's being ironic. "I apologize for the trouble, sir," he says, and reads a lot of numbers from the tickets. He scratches an ankle. All my father's socks are the same gray-black, so a hole in one won't ruin a pair. "No," he says, "only excited."

When he hangs up he looks at me a long time, stroking his beard. Then he says, "Let's jot a few things down," and reaches for his notebook and pen.

"Senior, senator, and senile are all from the Latin, signifying old." He carefully makes a checkmark on the blank page.

"There's a lot of money involved here," I say. "Do you feel he's steady?"

"Characterized by loss of memory." Check. Check. "Loss of mathematical ability."

"Do you feel," I ask, "that he could do something radical?"

"Disorientation in time and place."

Now there are four little hooks on his page. He frowns at them. I frown at them. I feel a strange rightness, an inevitability, in this scene: we have always enjoyed having a table between us. When the telephone rings I look up, but he's lost in thought, stroking his beard. The ringing stops. I tell him, "I've got a suggestion, I guess."

Though the trust fund is entirely mine—my father gets the interest during his lifetime—I was surprised that he wouldn't help me. He didn't oppose me, either. Before we left Florida, my grandfather's legal residence, I talked to a lawyer who earns his Porsches from non compos mentis. The bank is my grandfather's conservator. The New York and Florida houses are sold.

Now he lives across the street in our Ohio college town. Beyond the Pump-Ur-Self station, cornfields begin, which to him is fascinating and bizarre. Hector came too but left in the first winter, when it stayed below freezing for weeks. My grandfather's content now, but lonely. He has dinner with us every night.

I come in from running or ice-skating—I need to do something every day—from the freezing outside into the warm house, and I feel so alive it's unbearable. Twenty-two years old! Twelve billion neurons! I think of being my grandfather's age, or even my father's. I pretend my legs and back are stiff, and I can't hear well, and I stick out my stomach like I'm getting fat. For a second or two it seems real—like when I pretend I'm blind by closing my eyes—but later I haven't learned anything.

In the evening, after dinner, we sit in the living room,

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draperies open so we can look out at the falling, rising snow. The windward sides of trees and telephone poles are plastered with it. To leeward it lies in arcs that look drawn with a draftsman's curve. It swarms like moths around the streetlamps. When a car passes, catching a pedestrian in its headlights, the blown snow whirls so thickly around him that he looks legless, his angled upper half gliding along on foam.

"Amana Home Freezers," says my grandfather. "I came to General Electric with Amana in my pocket. Those stupid dopes! I showed them Maytag washers, too. I had Fred Maytag in the palm of my hand."

"A solid machine," says my father. He is only half paying attention, glancing up now and then from a stack of exam booklets, tapping them with his red ballpoint pen. He tells me, "Your mother always liked the Maytag. They cost a bundle but they were extremely well made."

"Still are," my grandfather insists sleepily, and sips his Scotch, content. I can feel his contentment. I suddenly know that when he was twenty-two he never locked his knees and elbows, stiffened his muscles until they cramped, to see what being old might be like. My father, perhaps, once squinted till the world blurred: interesting but useless. Only a man of feeling needs to bind his days together. Our bathroom has a mirror over the sink and one mounted on the opposite wall. I stand between them before I take my shower, a regiment of Roberts, doing in space what I want to do in time.

When spring comes, and my father has a symposium in New York, and I want to go too, we check my grandfather into a residential care facility, just for the week. He's still clear enough—he knows who we are—but now gets lost a block from home. I ask him whether he wants me to visit his old house in Scarsdale, and he says no, no point to that.

I rent a car and drive out the day after we arrive in New York. The house is freshly painted, an unfamiliar pastel, and the new owner has lined the long driveway with beds of flowers. At least a dozen dogwoods have been planted. A gardener is riding a growling lawn tractor back and forth among them, spreading something white from a hopper. Seeing me watching from my car, he waves. I wonder what the new people have done behind the house, whether the swimming pool still shimmers and steams at the end of its woodchip path. I can more easily imagine it vanished than still there.

The gardener waves again and I look at him closely. To my utter amazement, it's Hector! I recognize his shock of hair and black mustache, his perpetually beard-stippled cheeks, his broad bowed shoulders. I feel as happy and relieved as though I've discovered the afterlife. Though he and I have never been particularly close, I run up to embrace him. He sees me coming with outstretched arms and dismounts from his tractor but doesn't shut it off. The roaring moment before I reach him, I realize that it isn't Hector at all, in fact looks nothing like him—this is no gardener, I can tell, this is the new owner himself, starting to open his mouth, an enormous, thickly wrinkled man—but now he's opened his arms too, clearly mistaking who I am, persuaded by my joyous rush, and now it's too late for either of us to stop. □

MARGARET ATWOOD

SUMACS

At night I leave food out
on a white plate, milk in a white cup
and sit waiting, in the kitchen chair
beside last month's newspapers
and the worn coat leaning against
the wall: the shape of you left in the air,
time seeping out of it.
In the morning nothing has been touched
again. It is the wrong time of year.

*

Later, the days of the week unhook
from their names; the weeks unhook.
I do not lock the door
any more, but go outside and down
the bank, among the sumacs
with their tongues of dried blood
which have stopped speaking, to the pond
with its blackening water
and the one face wavering in it

wordless. Heaviness of the flesh infests me,
my skin that holds me in its nets;
I wish to change shape, as you have done
and be what you are

but that would be untrue also.

*

I lie on the damp yellowed grass bent
as if someone has been walking here
and press my head to the ground.

Come back, I tell you.
It becomes April.

If the daffodil would shed its paper
husk and fold back into its teardrop
and then down into the earth,
into its cold onion
and into sleep. The one place I can still meet you.

*

Grief is to want more.
What use is moonlight?
I reach into it, fingers open,
and my hand is silvered
and blessed, and comes back to me holding nothing.

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WILLIAM PENROD

WeCareTheMostInc., or The Big Check

When Bob Browning hired me I was only going to work being a WeCareTheMostInc presenter until I got one of those really big checks and then go somewhere and just write in the notebooks.

WeCareTheMostInc's ad was in TheHammondPaper and photostated copies of some of the really big checks they had already given some of their presenters were up on the bulletin board.

"See," Bob Browning said, taking me to the bulletin board right away when I went in and answered that ad, "this is what some of our presenters have been able to make in just one week here at WeCareTheMostInc!

"Take a look!

"See that one!

"Look at that check! That man wasn't even with us a full week and look at the check we gave him!"

I *just knew* that I was in the right place then and that I was supposed to get one of those really big checks too.

I even *saw* the photostated copy of that really big check with my name on it up on the bulletin board.

"Darling," Lana said, her eyes wide with excitement then, "this is the job for you!"

"Just think!

"When you get *that* big check with your name on it you'll be able to do anything you want!

"You know, I'll bet He guided you to that ad yesterday! I'll bet He made you open the paper yesterday when you were in Ziggie's and see their ad!

"You know, He does things like that!

"Yes, this is the job He wants you to have!"

Bob Browning said that I wouldn't be able to go out and start earning *that* big check with my name on it until Bob Frost gave my presentation an okay.

"He teaches our classes for us and he doesn't allow anybody to go out until they can make the presentation perfectly," Bob Browning said and then took my elbow and guided me into the WeCareTheMostInc classroom where Bob Frost was talking to three new presenters that had just been hired that morning.

There were signs and pictures on the walls:

The signs said: WECARETHEMOSTINC! A REVOLUTIONARY NEW IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME and the pictures were of old men and old women, smiling into their golden sunsets.

"I got another one, Bob."

"Thanks, Bob."

The three new presenters that had just been hired nodded their heads when I came in.

Lana said they looked like three cactus plants that had gotten into a rose garden by mistake and I sat down across from them and Bob Browning sat down in back of me.

"You know," Bob Frost said, looking only at me then, "you can't go out and start earning *that* big check with your name on it until you can make the presentation perfectly."

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"Like those big checks you saw up on the bulletin board," Bob Browning whispered then, right in my ear.

"There'll be classes," Bob Frost said.

"Classes start at 9 AM sharp," Bob Browning said.

"You'll be given material to study."

"Study it."

"It'll tell you everything you need to know."

"How to make the presentation."

"Perfectly."

"Study it tonight."

"When you get home."

"You can't go out and start earning *that* big check with your name on it until you can make the presentation."

"Perfectly."

"Like those big checks up on the bulletin board."

"You'll be given visual aids to use."

"They're part of the presentation."

"Practice using them."

"When you get home tonight."

"In front of the mirror."

"They're important."

The visual aids were pictures of a terrible looking old cemetery and a nice looking WeCareTheMostInc cemetery.

"Study your WeCareTheMostInc material."

"When you get home tonight."

"Practice using the WeCareTheMostInc visual aids."

"In front of the mirror."

"They're important."

"There'll be a class in the morning."

"9 AM sharp."

"Then you'll be given a chance to show us what you can do."

"You know," Bob Frost finished, looking only at me again, "you can't go out and start earning *that* big check with your name on it until you can make the presentation perfectly."

"Like those big checks up on the bulletin board," Bob Browning said, squeezing my shoulder then.

And the next morning Bob Frost started that first class pretending Vachel Lindsay, the office typist, was an average housewife and then made the presentation to her.

"Watch this," Bob Browning said, squeezing my elbow as Bob Frost pretended to knock on Vachel Lindsay's door, "he's good.

"He's real good."

"Yes, may I help you," Vachel Lindsay said sweetly, pretending to open that door then.

"Good morning, madam," Bob Frost said, smiling big then, "allow me to introduce myself, madam.

"I'm Bob Frost of WeCareTheMostInc. We're nationwide. Our main offices are in Florida.

"Perhaps, you've heard of us?"

"Why, yes," Vachel Lindsay said, blinking her eyes then, "I think I have heard of you."

"We're nationwide."

"Yes . . . yes . . . yes," Vachel Lindsay said, smiling then, "I have heard of you."

"Our main offices are in Florida."

"Ohhhh, yes," Vachel Lindsay said, smiling and nodding her head then, "I have heard of you."

"Very good, madam," Bob Frost said, still smiling big then, "and we're conducting a survey. Would you mind telling us, madam, just for the survey?

"Are you a christian?"

"Why, yes, I am," Vachel Lindsay said, blinking her eyes again, "yes, I am! Why, yes, I am!

"I certainly am!"

"Very good, madam," Bob Frost said again, smiling even bigger then, "and just for the survey, madam. Would you mind telling us, just for the survey, madam?

"Do you own your own cemetery plots?"

"Why, no," Vachel Lindsay said, looking worried then, "we don't. Why, no we don't."

"Dear lady," Bob Frost sighed wearily then, his head bending in sorrow, "you have no idea how many we at WeCareTheMostInc talk to who aren't prepared for the unexpected."

Bob Frost's eyes were damp and moist when he raised his head again and he sounded like he had just stopped by to say goodbye forever to Vachel Lindsay.

"And, dear lady," he sighed wearily when he finally spoke again, "it comes to all of us. It comes to all of us."

"Yes, I know," Vachel Lindsay said, shivering slightly then, "I know."

"You know, dear lady, we at WeCareTheMostInc have found that the selection of a final resting place is often the most painful decision that the loved ones who are left behind have to make when the unexpected *does* come.

"And, dear lady, it comes to us all!"

"Ohhhh, I know," Vachel Lindsay cried then, "I know! I know! I know!"

"But WeCareTheMostInc does have a few plots available now *only* for those who want to spare their loved ones *that* painful experience of having to select *their* final resting place when the unexpected *does* come.

"And we are now able to offer a choice of those plots, all of them in attractive and well maintained locations, to those who *do* qualify.

"And, dear lady, WeCareTheMostInc guarantees absolutely that *those* plots and locations will continue to be cared for and maintained!

"Here, dear lady," Bob Frost said, holding up the picture of that terrible looking old cemetery then, "is one of the typical uncared for locations that are being seen more and more across this great land of ours today!

"Take a look!

"They're a disgrace!

"They're a blight!

"They all tell the same story: Nobody cares!

"Do you see it, dear lady," Bob Frost asked with loathing and disgust.

"Ohhhh, I see it," Vachel Lindsay cried, her eyes filling with horror as she looked at *that* picture, "I see it! I see it! I see it!"

"And, dear lady," Bob Frost said, holding up the picture of that nice looking WeCareTheMostInc cemetery then and suddenly sounding like he was auditioning for one of those heavenly choir jobs somewhere, "this is

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one of the attractive and well cared for and maintained WeCareTheMostInc locations!

"See how nice it looks!

"See how peaceful it looks!

"How serene it looks!

"How restful!

"How comfortable!

"It tells the story!

"It says: Somebody cares!

"Do you see it, dear lady?"

"Ohhhh, I see it," Vachel Lindsay cried, smiling and nodding bravely then, "I see it! I see it! I see it!"

"And, dear lady," Bob Frost said, smiling and nodding bravely too then, "WeCareTheMostInc guarantees absolutely that those plots and locations will be well cared for and maintained forever!"

"I'll take two," Vachel Lindsay said when Bob Frost finished making the presentation.

"Now," Bob Browning said, squeezing my shoulder then, "that's the way you've got to do it if you want to get out there and start earning *that* big check with your name on it.

"Like those big checks up on the bulletin board.

"You ready to give it a try now?"

"No. Tomorrow."

"You know," Lana said when I went to bed that night, "you should have studied that WeCareTheMostInc material."

"I know."

"You should have practiced using those visual aids too."

"I know."

"You said you would."

"I know."

"You promised."

"I know."

"You should have."

"Tomorrow."

I did too. I didn't go into Ziggie's and drink beer or write in the notebooks or go to see *HER* that night. I just studied the WeCareTheMostInc material and practiced using those visual aids and practiced making the presentation but because of the dream I had that night I just never went back to WeCareTheMostInc again.

"Now," Bob Frost rumbled in that dream when I made the presentation perfectly, his face glowing green then, "he can go out and start earning *that* big check with his name on it!"

"Like those big checks," Bob Browning hissed, pointing a bony finger then, "up on the bulletin board!"

"Yesssss," Vachel Lindsay cackled, dancing in the mist and looking like one of those wicked broomstick witches then, "like those big checks up on the bulletin board!"

"Watch him go," Bob Frost rumbled.

"Yesssss," Bob Browning hissed, "watch him go!"

"Watch him go," Vachel Lindsay cackled and shrieked, "watch him go! Watch him go! Watch him go!"

"You sure don't look good, Ma'm," I said to the first average housewife I made the presentation to.

"Yes, Ma'm, you sure don't look good and I guess it's a good thing I stopped by.

"Ma'm, you look like you could go anytime now. Yes, Ma'm, you sure don't look good and could probably drop off any second now!"

"Well," she said, sighing, "I have been feeling a little poorly lately."

"I knew it, Ma'm!

"Why, as soon as I saw you, Ma'm, I knew you were on your way out!

"Yes, Ma'm, you're on your way out! No doubt about it, but don't worry about a thing, Ma'm.

"WeCareTheMostInc has a plot ready and waiting *just* for you and in an attractive location!"

"Well, I don't know," she said, sighing again, "I have so much to do. I haven't finished my cleaning and . . ."

"No more cleaning! No more scrubbing! No more cooking and it's right next to the shopping center too, Ma'm, and they've just cut the grass and there are flowers everywhere!

"Yes, Ma'm, it's so nice and peaceful out there and, Ma'm, WeCareTheMostInc guarantees that they will take care of that location forever and ever!

"Anyway, Ma'm, it's time for you to go! Yes, Ma'm, your time is up and you've got to go!"

"Well," she said, putting on her hat then, "I guess you're right and it *does* sound nice out there. I'll be ready to go in a jiffy. Just let me turn off the stove."

"What about your kids, Ma'm," I said to the next average housewife, "why don't you take them along too?

"You know, WeCareTheMostInc has plots for them too in their Kiddieland! Yes, Ma'm, their Kiddieland is very popular! They've got swings and slides and rides!

"You know, you might as well take them along too! If you don't, something really terrible will probably happen to them anyway!

"Why, they could get hit by one of those nutty drivers they got on the roads these days!

"Or maybe a fiend will grab them and, Ma'm, you know what terrible things fiends do!

"Why, they could get abducted and sold into slavery!

"Or end up hooked on drugs!"

"Yes," she said when I finished, "you're so right! I'll take them along too! I'll just wait until they get home from school and take them along too!

"They should be along any minute now. Would you care for a cup of tea?"

I dreamed I made the presentation to a man who had an attack and was laying on the sidewalk and waiting for an ambulance to come.

"You know," I told him, "you probably won't last too long even if they do get you to the hospital!

"They never do!

"You know, you're just going to have another attack anyway!

"They all do!

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"Why, I'll bet you have another attack before you get all those hospital bills you're going to have paid!"

"Go away," he said when the ambulance finally came, "go away. Go away.

"Don't bother me.

"I just wanna get buried in a WeCareTheMostInc cemetery.

"Go away."

I dreamed I made the presentation to Rocky in his cell on death row.

"Just tell da warden to fergit about da stay," he said when I finished, "and git on wid da execution so I can git berried in a WeCareTheMostInc cemetery!

"I wanna git berried in ParoleLand!

"No more guards! No more barred windows! Yeah, dats da place for me!"

"I wanna git berried in ParoleLand!

"I just wanna smell da flowers and listen to da boids choipin'!

"Yeah, tell da warden to hurry up and pull da switch and git da execution over so I can git berried in one of dem WeCareTheMostInc cemeteries too!"

I dreamed everybody signed up and got buried in a WeCareTheMostInc cemetery when I went to the old folk's home and made the presentation.

"What are you people waiting for," I said when I made the presentation to them.

"It's time for you to go! What are you waiting for?

"Don't you know how disgusting you've become?

"You can't feed yourselves!

"You can't dress yourselves!

"You need help to walk!

"You need help for everything!

"You even need help to go to the bathroom!

"You're disgusting!

"Take a look in the mirror!

"It's time to go!

"What are you waiting for?"

I dreamed I put four loads of orphans onto a special WeCareTheMostInc bus and took them out to a WeCare-TheMostInc cemetery.

"You know," I told them, "nobody wants you anyway. You might as well go. You know, you're just nuisances and nobody wants you anyway."

"Isn't there somebody who would want me?" the last one asked.

"No. Nobody wants you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm sure."

"Do I really have to go?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"Because nobody wants you!"

"Is that the only reason?"

"Because I want my name on the BIGGEST check ever made up on the WeCareTheMostInc bulletin board!

"Now, get on the bus!"

"Okay."

"Darling," Lana said when we were leaving, "you can do it! I know you can do it!

"Promise you'll study the material tonight!"

"I promise."

"Promise you'll practice using those visual aids too!"

"I promise."

"Promise you'll do it tonight?"

"Yes."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

But I didn't do it.

I just went into Ziggies then and sat next to the juke box and drank beer and wrote in the notebook I had with me.

That day I wrote the page called *Instructions In Case Of My Death.*

Lana said there was thoughtfulness on that page and humor and red blooded male for all to see, but when Mr. Frank and the group in his office called me in and talked about what I wrote that day they just acted like I had done something bad to the flag.

"Irresponsible," Roger said.

"Total lack of regard for others," Scott said.

"Unable to conform to patterns of the norm," Roy said.

"How," Dale asked, her round face looking like she *knew* who raided the fridge and ate that piece of pie she was saving then, "do you think your mother would have felt if your plans had been carried out?"

"Yes," Roberta said, drawing a big M in the air with her sharp pencil then, "how do you think *she* would have felt?"

On that page I said that in case of my death I didn't want them to tell my mother because I didn't want her to have to worry or feel bad.

I said that maybe they could tell her that I suddenly got drafted or that I had to go on some kind of secret mission for the government and that I would be back later on.

I said that I just wanted them to take me into Ziggie's and have a party with plenty of free beer and then wrote down the names of all the people I wanted to be invited and I had messages for some of them that I wanted Ziggie to read to everybody before the party started.

'See if you can repair me now,' was the message I had for Joe Gadget.

'If you don't break down and buy a round of beers once in a while I'm gonna come back and haunt you' was the message I had for Stash Benkowski.

I could *see* me laying there in Ziggie's and them having that party too. There was a big sign on the wall over where I was laying that said:

HE WAS A SWELL GUY

And everybody was saying:

"He was a swell guy."

"He was a swell guy."

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"He was a swell guy."

I said that when the party was over I wanted them to have me cremated and then have somebody take my ashes to the apartment of a Miss Kitty Lovejoy.

I said they made some of my favorite movies in Miss Kitty Lovejoy's apartment and wrote down the names of the movies she made that I liked best:

The Duchess And The Boy Scout Troop.
The Duchess And The Bellboys.
The Duchess And The Garbagemen.
The Duchess And The Destroyer Crew.
The Duchess And The TV Repairmen.

In that last movie it showed what happened when the Duchess's TV broke and twelve different TV repairmen went to her royal apartment and tried to fix it.

I said that I saw that movie three times and that it should have been called *One Long Night of Love and Joy.*

I said that I really liked all of Miss Kitty Lovejoy's movies and that if somebody took my ashes to her apartment then maybe I could watch her making movies and wouldn't have to miss any new ones.

When I went to see *HER* that night *SHE* said, "Why didn't you mention me in your will?

"Why didn't you mention me?

"You know, I've done a whole lot more for you than that Miss Kitty Lovejoy you're so crazy about.

"You should have mentioned me." □

DAVE SMITH

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

Behind us in the light of noon roofs
upflaming, logos
of farmhouse, barn, corncrib, and the voice
of the woman a reed
abandoned by the uncle stepping under oaks.
Finger to his lips,
bandannaed like a pirate, his game is
to stop up words
of fear in me. The snuffle of pigs
wallows near, a rooster
pecks back along the mountain laurel
while we descend a ridge
to come at the edge of woods that tick.
The stillness,
the trunks fallen like pews, the lace
of toadstools return to me
this Fall, and just
ahead the gelding sudden in that nave as God,
and, Christ, a Guinea hen
booms overhead, the shriek of an angel
I remember sharp enough
to blow open years of acorns. I see myself,
as I was, entering
that moment slight as Pythagoras who once
stood in staves
of wheat, not yet
dreaming a language of dust could help a man
tell a boy what stars were
trying to say,
or why you couldn't shake the feel of joy
under oak-crowns.
Once in that temple this uncle and I
pissed side by side.
I could hear everything in the world, a gabble
of waters like wind
hurled through a heart of rock, crows strafing
timothy, the horse
hidden to watch us from laurel and dogwood,
the voice like a woman's
crying us out of the singletrees of light
we were stepping. Then
the uncle, only a friend of the family,
no kin, gave me the sign
to go deeper into the interior, a place to learn
the way soldiers, American
immigrants, stacked their muzzles for words
from home, from the dead
whose faces would rise from their faces as
woodsmoke twisted
off in the leaves, the stars like flowers
or shellbursts.
Even now when I smell
the day burning on the hearths of our houses,
smoke ghosting the street,
I think how a man
will stand suddenly open-faced to the night,
radiant as a rock
the current lips and eddies around, as if
he understands something,
as if he might say it, though he says only
"Listen, listen."

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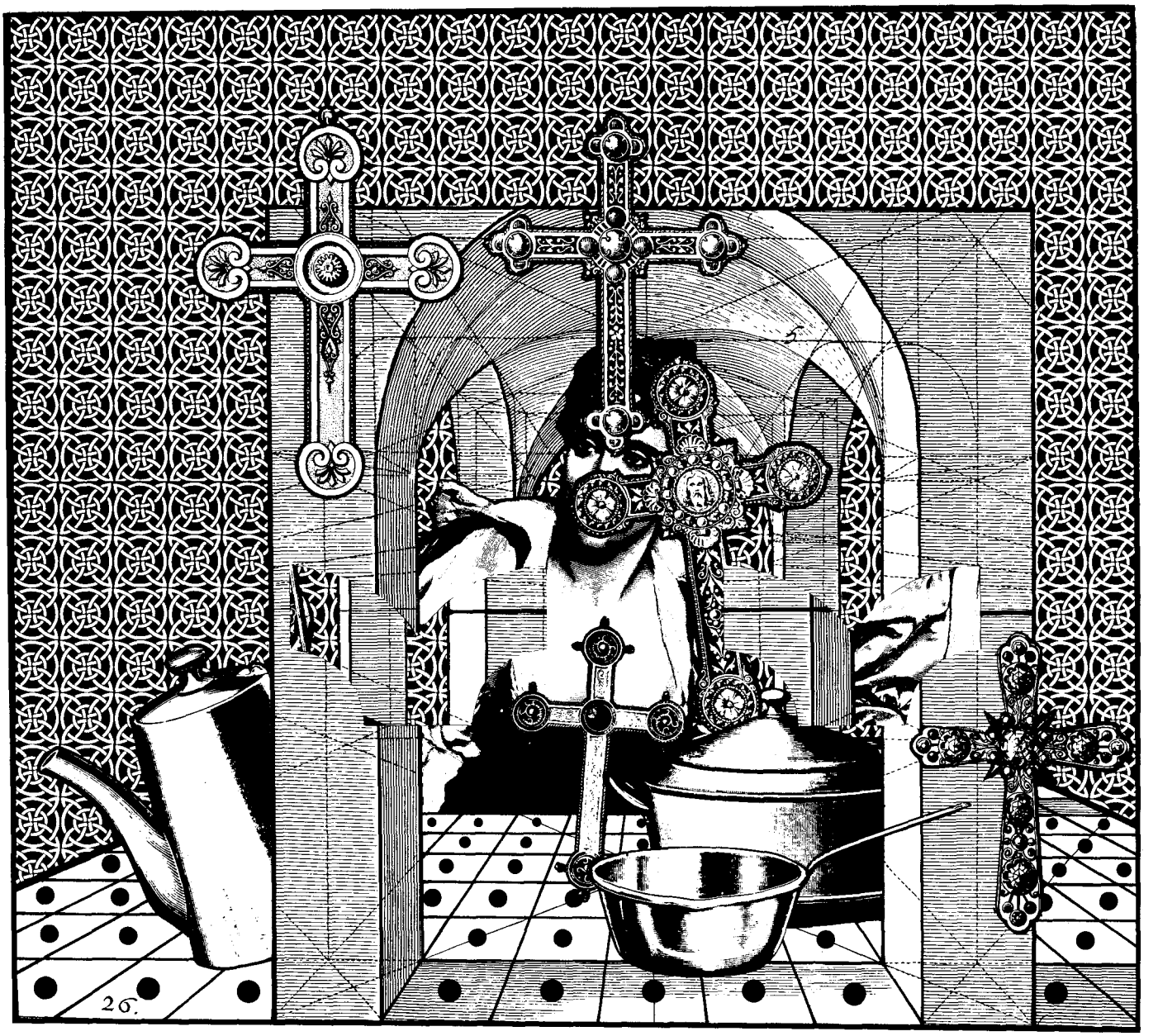
SINNERS

Sarah Rossiter



The moment Ruthie Lingle saw the two little Penningtons, she knew Jesus had sent her to the right place. In all her years of caring for children, she'd never seen any as needy as these. They sat on a brown sofa, staring up at her. The boy at least had some color in his cheeks, but the girl's face was pale as chalk, and her eyes held that look of empty sadness that Ruthie used to see in the eyes of half-starving children down home.

"They're always shy in the beginning, but I'm sure they won't give you any trouble," Mrs. Pennington said, talking about the children as if they weren't even in the room. Oh, it wasn't food the little girl was starving for; Ruthie had seen enough to know that.

Ruthie knelt down in front of them. "Hello there," she said softly. The boy blinked. The girl plucked at her dress.

"Dinah! William!" Mrs. Pennington said, her voice sharp as glass.

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"Now I don't mind a bit," Ruthie said, smiling at the children. "They don't even know me yet. You just give us some time alone, and everything will be fine."

Mrs. Pennington left the room, but the smell of her stayed behind. Perfumed scent and tobacco lay heavy in the air of the stuffy hot playroom.

"First things first," Ruthie said, walking over to the windows. "All that good clean air out there just going to waste. Look at that snow! Sun shining on it so pretty. Like frosting on a cake."

She was a big strong woman, but it seemed like the windows had been glued shut and never opened, not even in summer. She heaved and tugged, feeling the sweat collecting beneath her best dress. But all the while she kept on talking, letting the words out slow and easy so as not to frighten them.

"My," she said, having managed to raise one window half an inch. She moved to the next. "Seems like these have never been opened before. Maybe your other nannies weren't raised on a farm the way I was. Didn't know how good winter could smell, how good that clean air makes you feel. Me and my Daddy, every winter day we'd be out there chopping wood for the stove. Why, I could chop all day without getting tired, and my Daddy used to say, 'Ruthie girl, if you aren't the best and strongest worker I ever did see!' " Ruthie chuckled. "That's what he used to say. Oh, there was work. Had to be with all those mouths to feed, but there was fun too. You can bet I have some stories to tell about that. There!" The windows opened, she turned back to the children. "Open up your heart and let the sun shine in," she sang softly. "Got some songs to teach you too," she said, kneeling again so they wouldn't have to look up at her.

The children stared. Ruthie stared too. Smiling, she shook her head. "If you aren't the prettiest," she said. "Just like peaches and cream."

William was peaches, plump and rosy with silky blond hair and eyes like forget-me-nots. Dinah, with her dark hair and pale complexion, was cream. Her smooth skin reminded Ruthie of rose petals, and she longed to reach out, lay her hand on Dinah's knee. But it was too soon for that, and anyway, there was all the time in the world.

"Well now," she said, "I hear you've had nannies turning over faster than hotcakes on a griddle. But you won't be getting rid of old Ruthie so fast. Old Ruthie is here to stay, and we're going to have us some fun!"

"Fun," William said in a hoarse little voice.

"That's what I said, honey. You just wait and see."

"He always does that," Dinah said.

"What's that, child?"

"He's not saying anything. He just repeats the last word. Like a baby."

"A baby! Why, you're four years old, William. Much too big for a baby!"

"Baby," William said, smiling for the first time.

"See," Dinah said, smug.

"You know what I see, Dinah Pennington. I see two little children I just now met, and already I can feel inside how much I'm going to love them."

"I'm not little," said Dinah. "I'm nine years old already."

"I know that, and I know something else too." She touched Dinah lightly on the knee. Dinah blinked, but didn't pull away. "I know that those two little children are going to learn to love me back," said Ruthie. Beneath her fingers she felt a shivering in Dinah's leg, and Ruthie praised the power of His love.

Later the children showed her through the house. A modern house, all on one floor, with the children living at one end, the parents at the other. The long hallway reminded Ruthie of a coffin, and though there were plenty of rooms, and clearly plenty of money too, there was nothing pretty to look at anywhere. Glass and stone and bare white walls, and on every floor lay brown rugs as scratchy as burlap.

Ruthie met Mr. Pennington in the library, and right away she knew she'd have to watch out. Big and blond and beefy with a look in his eye and a hard strong handshake. "Wonderful!" he said, giving her fingers a squeeze. "Welcome aboard." Mrs. Pennington was sitting in a chair by the fire, but he kept holding Ruthie's hand as if he'd forgotten his wife was there. Ruthie pulled her hand away. "Thank you," she said, primly. "A sight for sore eyes, isn't she, Madeleine?" and Mr. Pennington, looking at Ruthie's dress.

"Yes indeed," said Mrs. Pennington, gazing into the fire. Her legs, Ruthie couldn't help noticing, looked skinny as pole beans in her tight brown pants, and sinner though he was, she felt a bit sorry for Mr. Pennington. Most men, like her Daddy, preferred women with some flesh on their bones.

"I'll be changing into my uniform as soon as I unpack," Ruthie said, moving towards the door, the children following.

"There's no need for that," said Mrs. Pennington.

"Absolutely not," said Mr. Pennington. "Pink and purple. That's quite a combination." He grinned at Ruthie. "We could do with some color in the house," he said. And though Ruthie said nothing in response, she couldn't help agreeing with him.

Ruthie loved color. She always had. She was glad the Penningtons didn't require a uniform. Though ordinarily she was happy enough to save her own clothes for days off, in this dark house the bright dresses and skirts brought comfort. She walked down the long shadowed hall, feeling like a beacon, a flame. But it wasn't enough.

With her first paycheck she bought a soft canary-colored rug that she placed over the brown one in her bedroom. "Sunlight on the floor," she said to the children who stood in the doorway, watching. "Come feel." She stood ankle deep in the soft yellow shag. "There," she said, wiggling her toes. "Doesn't that feel good!" The children crept into the room. William giggled. "Tickles," he said. Dinah bent to stroke it with her hands. "Can we lie on it too?" she asked.

"Of course you can, honey. That's what it's for."

Dinah, arms and legs half-buried in yellow shag, smiled up at Ruthie.

"You're a sight," Ruthie said. "Reminds me of the big steep hill behind our house covered with the softest grass you ever felt. We used to roll down from top to bottom,

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and it was just like floating down from Heaven on a cloud."

"Me too," William said, trying to push Dinah aside.

"I got here first!"

"Now there's plenty of room for both. I made sure of that." She settled them side by side. "If you don't look snug," she said. "We used to sleep like that, four to a bed, cozied up together, carrying on. Mama used to yell something awful, but it never did much good."

"My mother never yells at us," said Dinah.

"Nothing wrong with yelling, long as it's done with love," said Ruthie. "Oh, we had us some fun back then."

"I wish we could have fun like that."

"I told you we would, the very first day I came."

Dinah sat up. "My parents have fun," she said.

"I wouldn't know about that," Ruthie said.

"They do. I hear them. Last night I had to get up to go, and I heard them dancing and singing in the hall. I saw them too. Daddy was dancing with Mrs. Ryan, and her pearls popped, all over the floor. You should have seen them, crawling around, laughing like anything, and then Mummy . . ."

"That's not fun, child. That's sin!"

Dinah's eyes grew wide. "You mean bad?"

Ruthie nodded. "That's what I mean."

"That's not bad. That's silly."

"It's the Devil, child. He sneaks inside, and he tempts. Drinking and dancing and gambling with cards. The Devil's own fun, tempting us."

Dinah held her hand over her mouth as if to keep the Devil from slipping inside. Ruthie smiled. "No need to worry, child. The Devil won't trouble you. You've got me, and you've got Jesus watching over. Everyone knows Jesus loves little children best of all."

"Really?" said Dinah.

"Cross my heart," said Ruthie, crossing her heart, but she could tell by the way Dinah looked at her, it was going to take more than words to convince the child. "What I want to know," Ruthie said, walking over to her bureau, "is who's going to brush my hair for me today?"

"Me!" said William. "Me!"

"Me," said Dinah, jumping to her feet. "I'm oldest!"

Ruthie sat on the edge of her bed while Dinah, standing an arm's length away, timidly stroked at Ruthie's hair. Ruthie closed her eyes. Dinah edged around to the other side, brushing so lightly Ruthie could hardly feel the strokes. Still, in four weeks, it was the first time Dinah had touched Ruthie of her own accord. Never had Ruthie met a child who was so needy and yet so fearful too. Whenever she approached Ruthie, she would edge towards her sideways, like a crab prepared to scuttle backwards at the slightest sign of danger.

It was no wonder really. Loving ways didn't always come naturally, and in nine years all the girl had had was a string of starched English nannies, and two parents who didn't seem to know much about loving little children. Mrs. Pennington, when she kissed the children goodnight, puckered up her lips as though tasting an unripe persimmon, and Mr. Pennington's idea of fun was to grab the children under the arms and toss them in the air until they screamed with terror.

Dinah's brush strokes were getting stronger now. "Harder, child, harder. You can't hurt old Ruthie," Ruthie said. Dinah brushed harder and harder until Ruthie's scalp tingled and her hair crackled with static. She sighed with pleasure. "That does feel good all right," she said. "My Daddy used to do this for me when I was little. My hair, it was so long and so thick, he was the only one strong enough to get right down to the bottom layer."

"It's still long and thick," said Dinah.

"Not like then. Then it used to go right down to my waist."

"It's pretty hair," Dinah said, shyly.

"You know how to make an old lady feel good, Dinah Pennington!"

"You're not old."

"Going to be forty in the summer. Sounds old enough to me."

"You're young," Dinah said. "You're pretty."

"Pretty," said William.

"It's love," Ruthie said, laughing. "It's love that makes people pretty, and I'm just bursting with it. Come on," she said, rising, "Let's have us some fun."

She sat down at the old upright in the playroom. "Love of Jesus, Light the Way," she sang loud as she could, tapping her foot to the beat, her body swaying. By the time she reached the last verse, Dinah was humming along. Ruthie never stopped, but swung right into "This World Is Not My Home," and after that "Give Me Oil in My Lamp." By then Dinah was singing along too, singing in her high clear voice, and Ruthie had only to look at her bright happy eyes to know that Jesus was on His Way.

It was, however, Mr. Pennington who came first, and just when Ruthie had given up worrying about him too. In the two months she'd been there she'd hardly seen him at all, and she knew she had Jesus to thank for that.

But one night when she was at the piano, the children there too, both of them dressed for bed, all three of them singing and clapping and swaying, Ruthie smelled Mr. Pennington. She smelled whiskey, tobacco, and shaving cream coming through the door. She kept right on playing even though he was standing so close behind her she could feel his breath on her neck, feel the goose bumps rising on her skin. Thinking of Jesus and her Saving to steady herself, Ruthie played the hymn through to the end. Mr. Pennington placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Fantastic, Ruthie! A real disco beat!"

"Gospel, Mr. Pennington," she said, stiffly, feeling the heat from his hand right through her thin blouse. "Church music."

"Dancing's a sin, Daddy," Dinah said.

Mr. Pennington snorted. "Good God! Who told you that?"

"Ruthie did. She. . . ."

Ruthie stood up. Mr. Pennington's hand slid from her shoulder. "Bedtime," she said, looking straight at Dinah. Dinah looked down at her feet, and scuttled sideways out the door with William trailing after.

Mr. Pennington shoved his hands in his pockets, and grinned at Ruthie. "You're doing a great job," he said. "I wanted to tell you."

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"They're easy to love," Ruthie said, bending to straighten some books on a table so she wouldn't have to look at him.

"Maybe so. But all the same you've got a way with kids."

"I wouldn't know about that," Ruthie said. Picking up some clothes from the sofa, she moved towards the door. Mr. Pennington leaned against the wall, watching. "Don't get me wrong," he said, "but it surprises me you never had any of your own." Ruthie had to walk right past him to get to the hall. The whiskey smell was stronger than ever. His teeth gleamed. "Matter of fact," he said, "I'm surprised you're not married." He cocked his head so that his blond hair fell across one eye. "That's meant as a compliment," he said.

"Oh, I'm married all right," she said with a toss of her head, enjoying his blink of surprise. Once safely through the door, she turned to face him. "Been married for twenty-five years now. To Jesus," and she walked down the hall, leaving him standing there.

That night Ruthie's sleep was troubled, so troubled that around three o'clock she got down on her knees to pray. Night was the Devil's own time, the way he had of sneaking into dreams. She had dreamt of Mr. Pennington with his clean rich hands, his breath hot on her neck. He had picked up Ruthie's hairbrush, picked it up in such a way that for a moment she thought he meant to strike her. But instead he began to brush her hair, the strokes so hard, so rhythmic that her whole body swayed to the motion. Her scalp felt on fire. "How's that, Ruthie? That feel good?" he asked, just the way her Daddy had, and when Ruthie woke, her heart was beating like a trapped bird.

On her knees, she prayed, thanking Jesus for saving her all those years ago. But hard as she prayed, she couldn't stop the pictures from rising in her mind. There was the quiet brown pond down home with sunlight filtering green through the lacy willow on the bank. Air like honey, and everything still, everything except for a dragonfly with rainbow wings skimming the water, and her Daddy's hands. Fishing. They were fishing, the rod propped on a willow root, the red cork bobbing on the water, the bees in the meadow humming so steady that the noise seemed inside her, making her skin dance.

Ruthie got up. Night-time was nothing but trouble. Turning on the light, Ruthie began to brush her hair. She counted the strokes, one hundred and one hundred again. She was not without sin. She knew that, knew that her hair was her pride, her body her vanity. But, married to Jesus, she was safe from temptation. Perched on the edge of her bed, Ruthie waited for morning.

Ruthie loved morning; she always had. Night was dreaming time, and sometimes even Jesus couldn't save her from the loneliness she felt. Morning brought comfort, especially when the children, slowly growing less shy, took to creeping into her room at first light. Giggling and whispering, they would climb onto the bed, sliding down beneath the covers to snuggle against her, one on either side. It seemed to Ruthie that Dinah took to cuddling more than any child she'd ever known. She was always leaning up against Ruthie, holding her hand, even sitting in her lap. It was as if, after years of starving, she was at last getting enough to eat. Her dark eyes, so like her mother's, took on a shine, her pale face grew pink. And instead of scooting sideways, not daring to look up, she would run straight for Ruthie and jump into her arms, trusting Ruthie to catch her, hold her safe.

The days grew longer, the air thick and sweet with springtime smells of lilacs and fresh-cut grass. Blood ran hot in the spring, and Ruthie worried that Mr. Pennington would return. One soft night she heard music and laughter coming from the terrace. The children were asleep, and Ruthie stood at the window looking out. Colored lanterns swayed from the trees, and if it hadn't been for the sin the light revealed, it would have been a pretty sight. She saw Mr. Pennington dancing close with some red-haired woman. Both were barefoot, and Mr. Pennington's shirt was open at the neck so that the blond hair on his chest glinted gold in the lantern light. Ruthie leaned out the open window to get a better look, and Mr. Pennington, seeing her, waved. Quickly Ruthie ducked back in, out of sight, but not before she saw Mr. Pennington whisper something to the woman, heard the two of them laugh. Ruthie waited, but except in dreams, Mr. Pennington never came.

Now that the weather was fine, Ruthie and the children went out every day. At the bottom of the garden was a small pond with a mossy bank, lily pads, and two white swans. Ruthie liked to lie on the moss, feeling the sun pushing hard and hot against her skin, while the children played on the edge of the water. Most days they ate lunch there too, dainty lunches of deviled eggs, cold chicken, iced lemonade that the cook packed for them in a wicker hamper.

William's hair bleached white in the sun, his nose peeling pink. Ruthie and Dinah grew tan, and when they placed their arms side by side, the skin was the same color.

"Toast color," said Dinah.

"Butterscotch," Ruthie said.

Dinah laid her cheek against Ruthie's arm. "Maybe you're my real mother," she whispered.

"I'm not that," Ruthie said, "but I love you as much as a real one."

"I don't think that's very much," Dinah mumbled, her lips pressed against Ruthie's arm.

Ruthie stroked her hair. "There's love and there's love, Dinah girl, but always remember Jesus's love is best."

Dinah sat up, one strap of her yellow sundress sliding off her thin brown shoulder. Ruthie tucked it back in place. "Ruthie," Dinah said, "I heard you tell Daddy you were married to Jesus. Is that true?"

"It surely is!"

"Daddy says you're a Jesus freak."

Ruthie sighed. "Your Daddy doesn't know what he's saying."

"I heard him tell Mummy you were just asking for it. What's that mean, Ruthie?"

"That means men can be the Devil sometimes.

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That's the Devil in him speaking." Ruthie took hold of Dinah's shoulders, looking right into her eyes. "You listen, child. It's Jesus who Saves. I wasn't much older than you are now when Jesus found me and took me for His own. It was Jesus who saved me, saved me from temptation!"

"What's temptation, Ruthie?"

"Wanting to do what's sinful."

"But why would anyone want to do sin?"

"Because it feels good, that's why."

Dinah looked at Ruthie's hand on her shoulder. She looked up at Ruthie, and Ruthie could see the worry in her eyes. "It feels good when you touch me, Ruthie. Is that sin?"

Ruthie hugged her. "Course not, honey. There's touching, and there's touching. Just like there's different kinds of love. But you just wait till Jesus touches you. Then you'll feel Love, feel it and be Saved!"

"Saved!" said William, and Ruthie turned quickly. Hoping. His face greasy with chicken, William smiled. "Saved," he said again, and Ruthie knew he was only up to his old trick of repeating words. Gently she wiped the grease from his face. "You too, angel. Jesus will come to you too."

And Ruthie waited, watching the children for signs of His Coming. She waited all through the summer. In August Dinah would be ten, and Ruthie forty. In the seven months Ruthie had been with them, Dinah had grown almost half an inch. Her kneecaps, once sharp and bony, became round and smooth. Her legs were long and shapely, and she had a way of cocking her head when she smiled that reminded Ruthie of Mr. Pennington.

Dinah was too heavy now for Mr. Pennington to toss in the air. Instead, he lifted her, big as she was, up into his arms, and carried her off, down the long hall to greet the guests at the other end of the house. Though Ruthie could remember for herself the joy of being her Daddy's favorite, it hurt to see the light in Dinah's eyes as she was carried off, her arm resting lightly across Mr. Pennington's broad shoulders. Dinah was still a child; but time was running short.

Ruthie's birthday came first, and just as the sky was turning pink, the children leapt into the room, Dinah holding a small present wrapped in yellow tissue and tied with a pink string. Inside was a picture of Jesus, His arms held out, beckoning, a smile on His face. Ruthie kissed William; she kissed Dinah. "If you aren't the smartest! How did you know exactly what I wanted?"

"Easy!" Dinah said. "You know how you always tell me He's the best friend you have. Well, everyone wants to have a picture of their best friend. And so!"

"Oh, honey!" Ruthie kissed her again. "And are you smart enough to know He's your Best Friend too?"

"If He's yours, then He's mine too!" Dinah said, and Ruthie knew that Jesus was right around the corner.

Dinah's birthday came four days later. "Double digits," her mother said. "As a special treat you can have dinner with the grownups, all by yourself."

Dinah was excited. Too excited. Ruthie had to speak sharply to calm her down. Just before she went off, Ruthie gave her the present she'd been saving. Inside a real jeweler's box lined with shiny blue satin was a gold cross strung on a thin gold chain. Dinah's face flushed with pleasure. "Can I wear it right now?" she asked.

Ruthie fastened the chain around Dinah's neck, then tucked the cross beneath the collar of her dress. "There," she said, smoothing down the collar, making sure the cross was concealed, "This way Jesus is right next to your heart."

After Dinah had gone, William sat, lonesome on the sofa, sucking his thumb. Ruthie, to distract him, played some gospel on the piano. It was a hot still night, and her fingers stuck to the keys. William scooted onto the bench, but he was too young to carry a tune well, and Ruthie found his off-key croak jangling to her nerves. Dinah had a real ear for music, and she and Ruthie sang most of the hymns in harmony.

At eight o'clock she put William to bed, and then she settled down for prayer. Usually praying was like falling into a trance; she could slip so deep down inside herself that everyone but Jesus was forgotten. But not tonight. It was so hot. Her hair felt heavy, and damp with sweat. A mosquito buzzed in her ear. And even on the soft yellow rug, her knees ached. Every few minutes she lifted her head to look at the clock. Finally, at nine, when there was still no sign of Dinah, Ruthie gave up. Birthday or not, it was time for little girls to be in bed, and if her parents didn't have the sense to know that, Ruthie would do the fetching herself.

She walked down the long hall. In the front hall moths banged against the screen door. Beneath the table she saw a glimmer of white. Stooping, she found a pearl stuck behind the table leg. She supposed it was one of that Mrs. Ryan's, lost ever since that party Dinah had mentioned months before. Ruthie slipped it into her pocket.

In the kitchen the cook was washing up. They nodded to each other, and the cook gestured with her head towards the dining room. Ruthie was always careful to keep her distance with the other help. Several jobs back she had Saved Minnie, a big black fun-loving cook, who had then gone into repeated trances, always while cooking dinner so that meal after meal was ruined. In the end both she and Ruthie had been fired. Ruthie hadn't minded for herself, but she still felt badly for Minnie, whom she'd liked.

Ruthie pushed open the door to the dining room, and stopped short. Tall white candles flickered on the table, leaving the rest of the room in shadow. Ruthie blinked, her eyes adjusting to the semi-darkness. The three of them were grouped at the far end of the table, Mrs. Pennington seated beside her husband who sat at the head, Dinah in his lap. Smoke from their cigarettes drifted towards the candle flames. There were three wine glasses; in each red wine glowed like rubies. Dinah, her eyes half-closed, lay back against her father's chest, her head tucked beneath his chin. His arms were wrapped around her waist. Seeing Ruthie, Dinah smiled. "Ruthie," she murmured.

"Ruthie!" said Mr. Pennington, smiling too. "Just in time to toast our grownup girl."

"Ten was my favorite age," said Mrs. Pennington,

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and, taking a sip of wine, she too smiled at Ruthie above the rim of her glass.

"It's the girl's bedtime now," Ruthie said. "I've come to fetch her."

Mr. Pennington chuckled. "If looks could kill," he said. "Look at our Ruthie, Madeleine. The wrath of God."

"The child is too young to be drinking wine, Mr. Pennington, and too old to be sitting in her Daddy's lap. Dinah!"

But Dinah only smiled. "Not yet, Ruthie. Please."

Ruthie advanced, and taking Dinah by the shoulders, pulled, but Mr. Pennington held fast to Dinah's waist. "Don't be such a spoilsport," he said. "We're having a good time."

Ruthie dug her fingers into Dinah's shoulders. "Right now!" she said.

"Ouch," said Dinah. "That hurts."

"Joe. Let go," Mrs. Pennington said, putting out her cigarette. "I guess the party's over."

"Well, for God's sake, what's she think I'm going to do?"

He let go of Dinah so suddenly that Ruthie almost fell over backwards with the girl in her arms. She glared at Mr. Pennington.

"You ought to be ashamed!" she said.

"Heaven help me," he said. "What did I do now?"

Without another word, Ruthie took Dinah by the hand, and marched her from the room. She put her to bed, then flushed the pearl down the toilet. And the very next morning, she set both children on the yellow rug, and told them about Hell.

Hell was the place for anyone, she said, looking straight at Dinah, young or old, who spent their earthly days drinking and carrying on.

"But I didn't drink," Dinah said. "I tasted it, and it was yucky." Ruthie ignored her. She told them about the vats of burning oil, and the heavy chains, each link another sin. She told them that those too blind to see the Light had their eyes poked out with red-hot needles. She kept right on until at last William's lip began to tremble. He burst into tears. "No more! No more!" he cried, his hands over his ears. Dinah, however, sat sullen, hard as stone, picking on her fingernails, and not even looking at Ruthie, who stopped to comfort William.

"I didn't sin," she said. "I know I didn't."

"There's sin and there's sin, child," Ruthie said, rocking William.

"I had fun! It was the best birthday I ever had."

"Just like there's different kinds of fun. Good clean fun and the Devil's, and all this time Jesus just waiting to Save you."

"I don't need Jesus, Ruthie," Dinah said. "I have you."

"You find Jesus, and you won't need me anymore. When I'm gone, you won't even miss me," Ruthie said in a loud, hard voice, and at last it was Dinah's turn to cry.

"Don't, Ruthie!" she cried, jumping to her feet and hugging Ruthie so tight around the neck that Ruthie could hardly breathe. "Don't leave me!"

Ruthie patted her back. "Course I won't, child. Ruthie and Jesus will be with you always."

And sure enough it was that night that Jesus chose to come. Some time after midnight Ruthie heard crying from William's room. She found him, sitting up, tears streaming down his face. He stretched his arms towards Ruthie. "Saved, Ruthie, saved!"

"Oh, angel, Glory be!" Quickly, while the Spirit stayed with him, she got him to his knees, and they prayed together, William repeating after Ruthie the sins he was renouncing forever. It wasn't until Ruthie was helping him back into bed that she noticed Dinah, thin and scowling, in the doorway.

"He just had a nightmare. He's not saved. Just a big baby, scared of Hell."

"You hush now!"

"I won't! He just wants you to love him best."

"I love the both of you," Ruthie said, calling on Jesus for patience, "and Jesus does too!"

"Stupid Jesus. I hate your stupid old Jesus."

"Jesus," said William. "I love baby Jesus."

"Shut up, baby!"

"Baby Jesus," William said, smiling.

Dinah, her fists clenched, moved towards him, but Ruthie moved faster and, grabbing Dinah by the shoulders, shook her hard.

In the morning only William climbed into Ruthie's bed. It wasn't until they had finished praying and were all dressed that Dinah appeared. She stood in the doorway, one foot resting on the other, her long legs bare in her summer nightgown. "Ruthie," she whispered, looking down at the floor, "Ruthie, I've been saved."

"Look at me, child," Ruthie said, and Dinah looked, and Ruthie saw no Love in her face. Beneath her tan, Dinah's skin shone pale and her eyes were dark and cold with fear.

"Jesus doesn't like liars," Ruthie said, spacing the words so they fell heavy as stones into a deep well, and after one quick awful look, Dinah ran back into her bedroom and slammed the door.

All that day she acted like the Devil was in her. When William built a block tower, Dinah waited until the last block was in place before kicking it over. And when he cried, she laughed, pulling her eyes into slits and sticking out her tongue. At the pond she threw stones at the swans so that they hissed with rage, beating the water with their wings, and William, frightened, began to cry again. "Crybaby," Dinah sneered. Ruthie sent her back to the house. She went slowly, not looking back, kicking at the pebbles on the path.

When William and Ruthie came up from the pond, she was playing Slap-Jack on the playroom floor. "Wanna play?" she asked William.

William looked at Ruthie who shook her head. "You've been Saved, angel. Remember?"

"Stupid old saving!" Dinah said, slapping a Jack so hard that the windows rattled.

Ruthie's heart ached for her. Crouching down, she touched Dinah's shoulder. "Honey," she said, "I love you. You know that, don't you?"

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Dinah kept right on turning over the cards. "There's love and there's love," she said in a voice that sounded just like Ruthie's own, the voice of a grown woman.

She closed up after that, cold and quiet for the rest of the day, and when at bedtime, Ruthie bent to kiss her, Dinah pulled away from her to face the wall.

"Sweet Jesus," Ruthie prayed that night, "Save Dinah as You once Saved me!" but her heart was heavy, and her dreams bad. In one dream Jesus came, His white robes rustling as He bent to kiss. "There's touching, and there's touching," He said in her Daddy's voice, and His breath on her neck was so hot that Ruthie woke, trembling.

She heard drums beating, horns wailing like cats in heat, and thought at first she was still dreaming. But the sky was pink, and the music, loud enough to make her skin dance, was coming from the playroom.

She opened the door, and her heart stopped. Dinah was dancing, strutting and swaying in feverish circles around William who sat, wide-eyed on the floor, staring up at his sister. "Temptation, I am temptation," Dinah sang in her high clear voice. "Come and have fun with me." She wore her thin white nightie through which every part of her body could be seen, and the cross Ruthie had given her shimmered as she turned. On the floor between them lay a pack of playing cards.

"Temptation," Dinah sang, one hand cupped against her chest, the other stretched towards William who, giggling, started to rise.

"Shame!" Ruthie cried, and William spun towards her. Dinah spun too, arms dropping to her sides, and the picture she had been holding pressed against her chest, fell to the floor. Jesus in his gilt frame, the glass broken. Ruthie looked down at the picture; she looked at Dinah. "Dancing with Jesus," she said in such a voice that Dinah's face grew pale.

"I was lonely," she whispered.

Ruthie didn't answer. Crossing the room, she hit the arm of the phonograph, and the needle scratched the record into spinning silence. One more time she turned to Dinah who was staring at her, looking pale and frightened—so like she had when Ruthie first came, that for an instant, only an instant, Ruthie was tempted to forgive.

DEBORAH PEASE

WAKING

Tonight we return to the sea, not the slate-grey
Fathoms of my impenetrable North, but the brimming
Clear eye of your Adriatic youth, colors
Fantastic as plastic.
Into the green plasticity we slip, smooth
As icthyosaurs, or seals, marring the surface
Less than the deft
Plop of a child-dropped pebble.

You don't even test the wavelets with your toe.
We enter the aqueous land
Of our dreams; mammals returned to an element
More hospitable than earth,
A realm where the effort of motion
Is eased, erased, vestigial.
We never consider the problem of breathing;
The sea is our respiration.

You carry a suitcase and a ring of keys.
I hold a photograph album.
We float down to a pleasure-craft, massive
As a Spanish Galleon, many-chambered
As a congress of hearts.
No sign of wreckage, no depredations of salvage.
All is intact, glacially lucid.
We undulate through the blood-warm sea.

When you begin to unpack, you realize
You have brought a suitcase belonging
To your dead father, who waits for it
At the railway station; who waits for you.
One by one you fit the keys
Into your mouth, agape
With the panic of forgetting
What you must unlock.

The album magnetizes me, a compass
Of the past, disorienting the present.
The static poses dissolve like ectoplasm.
The cabins of the ship overflow
With family members, genial in celebration,
Toasting me, as I seek aggrieved escape,
With the sonar of concussive stones.
Life and death: blurred by a school of minnows.

We open our mouths to scream; you succeed.
You have found the right key.
You attempt to re-pack, but your father's clothes
Slither away like kelp.
A hook, carelessly baited, sways by a porthole.
Holding your hand, I swallow
The deceit, dragged to daybreak
By the claw taut at my heart.

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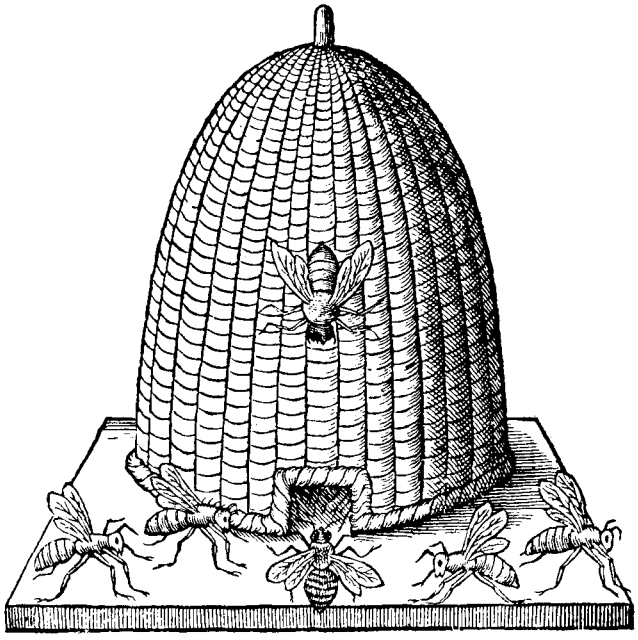
LORRAINE DUGGIN

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE MOTHER TONGUE



Honeybees communicate by dancing. Not 'bee-bop' or 'wasp-waltz' but a precisioned set of movements the bee makes inside the hive. These dances—called the pull, the round, the sickle, the figure of 8, the wagging dances—are all the means by which one foraging bee lets others know the location, distance, quality, and quantity of a nectar.
—from *Habits and Habitats of the Honeybee—College Science Series*

I never spoke a single word to my grandfather, and he never spoke to me. In all those summer-long years of my childhood, when my father drove our old Chevy with my mother and me the one hundred miles from Omaha to Thurston with its population of ninety, what I remember most is the silence. Silence and the ritual of shaking my grandfather's hand when we arrived, and shaking it again when we departed for home.

He had a square dark face, a square jaw, and when he gripped my hand, he fixed deeply-set eyes upon my face until I felt weak under them. I could feel them piercing me to my marrow like the clutch of talons, but most of the time I had young wisdom enough to stand firmly under his gaze. Owl-eyed and brush-lipped, he seemed forever disapproving.

Inside his small, yellow-stuccoed house, I avoided his dark, brooding figure, for I sensed there was no room for weakness in my grandfather's household and, in his eyes, sensitivity was no virtue to be cultivated: toughness and endurance were. Yet somehow, though he never told me, I also felt there was a special bond between us, and that of his thirty-nine grandchildren, he had singled me out. It was as though he expected something different from me, something more than from the others. I felt open to his challenge.

The early years of those visits were crowded with buzzing and swarming of relatives: aunts and uncles and cousins who gathered annually for reunions. My mother, her six sisters and four brothers, my father and the other in-laws, were welcome to come, to stay as long as they wished, just as long as they honored my grandfather's single rule, a long-upheld, now unspoken command: that no one ever speak the English language inside his house or in his presence.

The Czech tongue the grown-ups spoke kept me curious and distant.

Except at mealtimes, my cousins and I stayed clear of the house. Immediately after the ritual of handshaking, we escaped to climb shaggy trees in the apple orchard, to pick strawberries, plump and ripe, from the garden behind the house, to roam hilly sand roads of rural northeastern Nebraska, or do balancing acts on rust-coated, weed-covered railroad tracks that led out of town in two directions. We gravitated toward special places we'd discovered on our own: the abandoned train depot with its faded THURSTON lettered upon maroon sides, the empty grain elevator standing tall along the tracks, the pioneer cemetery marked by five smooth stones tilted in thick bunchgrasses under an oak that grew along the side of the road leading back to the farm my grandfather retired from.

Mealtimes, we gathered in shifts around the dining room table, and throughout the comings and goings my grandfather remained seated at the head. While Mother and my aunts shared chores of cooking, serving, and cleaning up, I picked vegetables straight from the garden, ruffled green leaves of lettuce to be served with the creamy buttermilk dressing Aunt Blanche made.

Sweet-sour dishes of knedlicky, zelí, and liver dumpling soup were heaped upon the table. The main courses—roast goose, pork, and roast beef—were brought from my uncles' farms nearby, while tart yellow fruits of apple pies, apple strudel, apple butter, and applesauce came straight from the orchard behind the house. Poppyseed-sprinkled housky and rohliky, warm and sweet, were spread golden with honey from my grandfather's hives.

After dark, there was little to do. Inside the house, I grew bored and restless. My grandfather sat silently in a dark corner of the living room in a brown leather chair, reading *Hospodár*. I liked to read, but his newspapers and magazines in foreign print were indecipherable to me. Sometimes I sat quietly looking through piles of tattered scrapbooks of family photographs; sometimes my cousins

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and I took the only game, an ancient Ouija board, out to the back porch. We took turns in the dim and dusky light asking questions of it, one by one laying hands upon its tear-shaped marker, each one trying not to guide it, each one accusing the others of cheating. My cousins seldom noticed if I wandered away alone.

"Stay away from the hives," my mother warns, following me out the back door. She's allergic to bee stings, having suffered often from them as a child on the farm where my grandfather grew an enormous apple orchard pollinated by bees he kept in rows of stirring hives nearby. Bee-stings caused my mother's face to swell and puff and her throat to constrict horribly, and though I've been stung a few times myself, I've never experienced the anaphylactic shock Mother fears will one day be the death of her.

Since my widowed grandfather retired from farming and moved into Thurston, all he has with him from that former life are a single white row of honeybee hives that border his yard and, next to them behind the yellow house, the small orchard of apple trees he transplanted from the farm. But these aren't ordinary apple trees. This is a minature backyard paradise of variegated trees upon which he has spliced up to six varieties of apple: Jonathan, winesap, golden and red delicious, Rome beauties, MacIntosh, all covering a single tree. This garden thrives under his care and fresh plantings. Even the hollow tree at the edge of his orchard, an ancient hulk growing there before he moved into Thurston, still produces apples in spite of the decayed heartwood at its center. When he comes out here to work, I lose all my inhibitions toward him. I follow him around and observe him silently working among his hives and grafting his trees.

He grafts tender young limbs to stocks with exquisite care, hands gentle and precise as a surgeon's suturing the skin of a child. He slits the bark of each small twig, inserts the foreign limb, then anoints the joining with his pungent turpentine salve. It's the same salve, I am sure, he rubs on my own wounded limbs as poultice for splinters collected tree-climbing or to cool my skin from burn of bee-stings. After sealing the tree's fresh wound, he wraps fresh grafts with strips of canvas; in time sap from the root stock will flow throughout, and another tree will bear upon itself integrated varieties of apple.

The aura of mystery surrounding my grandfather is compelling to me.

If I sneak back into the house while he's still outdoors, I hear snatches of whispered conversation, the low hum of the forbidden English language: *stubborn old man, hard-headed, iron-willed.* But when *he* comes inside, the women take up speaking the Czech language again as though they'd never abandoned it.

"Why did Aunt Millie say Grandpa is hard-headed?" I ask my mother on the trip home. My father is driving, my mother, hair curly and golden, sits beside him in the front seat, and I'm in the back with a basket of fresh apples, three jars of honey, and two jugs of apple cider my grandfather sent home with us.

"Never mind," she says.

"Dad?" I begin, but he gives me a stern look. "Ask your mother. He's *her* father."

"Well, what was everybody talking about?"

"I said never mind," my mother repeats.

A few moments later, I try again. "Why did you say Aunt Marty is just like Grandpa?"

"Because she's stubborn. Won't give up," she says, her head rigid.

"Is that bad?"

She doesn't look at me. "I don't know."

"Well, is it?"

"I said I don't know. Now mind your own business." I'm silently thoughtful the rest of the trip home.

It seems odd to me the bees never sting my grandfather. He cleans out hives of honey, while bees rage in dark motion about him; he even allows individual bees to walk across his fingers as he speaks to them in low murmurs—all without harm to himself. I've watched him sit for a spell unprotected among his hives, watching the bees spiral in clouds of rapid flight toward the apple orchard where they go to pollinate nectar-laden blossoms.

"Find somewhere else to play," my mother warns whenever she catches me near the hives, watching him watch their purposeful choreography. As bees turn and twist about his head, he moves through the droning mist of them like some kingly immortal, swarmed by subjects who bow and dip to him. "It's because he knows their language," is all my mother ever says to explain it.

Riding back to Omaha with my parents after a weekend visit the spring I'm twelve, I ask my mother, "Why doesn't Grandpa learn English, so I can talk to him?"

"Because he won't," she says, not looking at me, fastening her eyes somewhere outside the car window.

"Can't he learn English?"

"He can do anything he wants to do. Always could. He broke the land." She tells me then that he was a blacksmith, carpenter, and mechanic at the same time he farmed, that he shod his own horses, led a threshing crew, built the Jan Huss Presbyterian Church in Thurston almost single-handedly. I've never heard any of this before.

"Did he *ever* speak English?" I ask.

At first I think she doesn't hear me, because she looks steadily toward the telephone poles that blur past us along the highway. "He never had any trouble doing business in town though, I'll say that. He was even on jury duty once. Just a few years ago, when the doctor still allowed him to drive. That was in Omaha. He must have spoken English, but he never let us know he did. We always spoke Czech to him." She's still looking out the window. After a small silence, she turns toward me as though she has become aware of me for the first time. "He's afraid if he gives in, his language will die with him. The old folks are always afraid of that."

And so when the Bohemian National Hall, the Czech fraternal organization in our neighborhood in Omaha, began offering Saturday morning classes in the Czech language—something it's done not infrequently over the years—and when some of my friends signed up, I did too.

From the coffee can in the back of her enameled kitchen cabinet, my mother counted out in quarters the two dollars I needed for the cost of the textbook. "Will I

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be able to listen to the grown-ups talk at Grandpa's now?" I asked her.

"You won't learn it overnight." She spoke quietly, but still she seemed pleased.

While she washed the mound of clattering dishes in the sink, I sat at the kitchen table with feet propped on a wooden chair. In our small house, the kitchen was at its center, a wide archway opened into the living-room to one side, two bedrooms off another, our bathroom off the third. "You and Dad won't be able to talk about me at the supper table anymore," I told her. Occasionally at mealtimes, expressionless faces masking the meanings of their words, my parents spoke in that mysterious language I couldn't fathom except for a word or two, and now and then, the sound of my own name pronounced in strangely rolling syllables.

"Don't count on it," she smiled, shoving a starched white dishtowel at me. "Dry."

Most of our neighborhood youth signed up for Czech school sometime before they were grown. Our immediate neighborhood, called Brown Park, was originally settled by Bohemian immigrants early in the century—my father's parents lived in our house before I was born; my father grew up there. My mother and all of her sisters moved from the farm to the city, at least for a time, and married men of Bohemian—or Czech—descent, except for Aunt Blanche, who stayed single and moved back to the country after only a month, and Aunt Marty, who married a Swede.

Omaha was a melting pot, a Tower of Babel. First and second generation Czechs, but also Mexicans, Poles, Irish, Italians, Negroes and Germans lived within our community. Although my parents thought it odd, to me it seemed natural some of their children, my schoolmates, occasionally signed up to learn the Czech tongue too.

We "bohunks" were in the majority, of course, but "polacks" and "dagos" were among my playmates in Brown Park, as were "spics" and "krauts"; I knew that "nigger" was somehow intended as pejorative, just as I recognized "bohunk" to be, but in that insular community, I think one could become an adult without learning much about real prejudice. As a child I knew nothing about the persecution of Jews, the oppression of Blacks, the economic deprivations of the Spanish-American, or the stigma of being a "D.P.," which is what we called the post-World War II refugees from Lithuania and Latvia who flocked into our neighborhood in the late 1940s and '50s—although my mother pointed out that the D.P.'s seemed to live in slightly better houses than most of us.

I spent Saturday mornings one school year in a class of forty-five young people ranging in age from five to fifteen, all in a single class as in a country schoolroom. Our teacher was Mrs. Charvat, a retired elementary school teacher, whose wrinkled face could have been a withered apple left to winter on the bough. This woman still held to the ethnic dream of her native culture: that it should never die. And we students, her hope for the future, those future generations appointed to carry on Czechoslovakian traditions in this free land, sat in the overcrowded room in crooked rows of carved-up, battered desks, passing notes—in English—back and forth among our friends, playing tic-tac-toe across the aisles in back rows, joking and poking and squirming for two hours each Saturday morning. For all the while Mrs. Charvat drilled us in Czech vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure, and grammar, all the time she taught us to memorize her native songs and poems, the undiluted flow of American blood coursed through our veins.

"We don't have this sound at all in the English alphabet," she told us. "Pronounce the 'ch' as you do when you say 'Loch Ness Monster.'"

"Mrs. *Ch*ar - vat," the class repeated in careful unison.

"Good. Now say the word for 'river' and remember the 'r' has a hook on it, a *háček*."

"*Reka*." we chanted. "*R-reka, r-reka, r-r-reka*."

"Good. Now who can say 'It is raining outside' in Česky?"

I raised my hand. My classmates fidgeted and snickered. I brought my hand down.

"It is raining outside," Mrs. Charvat repeated, and she pointed to me. She never remembered any of our names.

"*Prší venku*," I said. I heard a giggle behind me.

My mistake became her object lesson. "*Prší venku* is all right, but *venku prší* is better. The Czechs like to put their adverbs *before* verb forms. Or *prší* by itself says the same thing. A one word sentence. We have lots of those in Česky. *Prší*, class. Now say it all together."

"*Pr-ší*."."

"Pr-r - shee" she enunciated. The wrinkles in her cheeks grew pronounced as she exaggerated the word. "R-r-roll your r's."

"*Pur-r-r - s-h-e-e-*," we responded.

If I were a typist who misplaced hands on the keyboard, I'd have made words that looked like these. If I were a pianist playing blindfolded, I'm sure I would have made sounds as dissonant to my ear as these. Gradually, though, I learned to pronounce the unnatural-looking words I saw on the pages of my textbook and to recognize meanings of some of those guttural foreign sounds. Still it was with great difficulty my poor provincial mind performed those necessary magical translations which would allow me to converse even haltingly in this new tongue.

As the sessions neared conclusion, Mrs. Charvat prepared a program to be given to our parents. Each of us was given a poem, song, or short recitation piece to memorize for the event. I rehearsed my song until she told me my accents were all in their proper places. I practiced alone in my room when there was no one around to hear, the words still queer to my tongue and palate, feeling rather foolish as I repeated them to myself. I wondered who on earth invented such an outlandish language where sometimes "k's" pronounce like "g's," where consonants group together in strings of three or four without a single vowel to relieve them. "*Skví*," I repeated again and again. "*Skví*."

When the day arrived, I walked the block and a half from our house to the hall. Mother sewed a new green plaid dress for me to wear and braided my hair with matching green ribbons. The classes were conducted on the dingy second floor, but our program would be held on

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the main floor in a ballroom-auditorium that doubled as a gymnasium on Thursday evenings when the Sokols, the Czech gymnastic teams, trained. On Saturday nights the same room reverted back to ballroom for brawling wedding receptions, the building resounding with oom-pah-pah's of polka music and swarming with high spirits of beer-drinking, red-faced dancers who polkaed, waltzed, jitterbugged, danced the Flying Dutchman and Circle Two-Step between long cold guzzles of honey-colored *pivo*.

When my parents took me to these celebrations, while gaily dressed dancers whirled and dipped to heavy musical beats under revolving, circular and multicolored lights that hung from the ceiling, I twirled and slid with other young people over a slippery dance floor sprinkled with coats of powdered wax.

On hot summer nights, the huge double doors of the hall were thrown open, and the flushed and laughing crowd spilled onto the sidewalk and scattered into the gravel parking lot to cool perspiring bodies away from the sweltering heat inside. Far into the night, rhythmic beats of tubas, accordions, and basses could still be heard at our house, a block and a half away.

My turn comes. I walk from the wings onto center stage and see the auditorium filled with neighborhood folk. Mrs. Charvat plays the opening chords, and I announce my piece: "*Češka národni hymna.*" I sing the first notes, then falter and stop as my throat constricts; for in the front row between my parents, his black eyes fixing me, sits my grandfather. I cannot understand what has brought him here. His owlish image, severe and commanding within this crowded hall of friends and neighbors, is startlingly foreign to me.

Mrs. Charvat repeats the opening chords for me, and finally I catch my cue and sing:

Kde domov můj? Kde domov můj?
Voda hučí po lučinách,
bory šumí po skalinách,
v sadé skví se jara květ;
zemský ráj to na pohled!
A to jest ta krásná země,
země česka, domov můj-
země česka, domov můj.

Then as she repeats the melody softly, I recite the English translation Mrs. Charvat has taught me. I do not look at my grandfather:

Where is my home? Where is my home?
Waters roaring o'er the meadows
Pine trees rustling on the mountains
Gardens with spring blossoms gleam
An earthly paradise greets the sight
And that is that beautiful land
Czech land oh my home
The Czech land, my home.

As I finish speaking, I look at my parents sitting in the front row with my grandfather, but while their eyes are on me, their faces remain expressionless.

Immediately after the program, I leave my huddle of friends backstage and cross the room to join my family. I offer my hand to my grandfather. He shakes it in our common ritual. I'm tongue-tied in his presence, even more so than usual, for he seems so strangely out of his habitat here. I might have offered *dobrý den* or *ahoj*, had I presence of mind. He holds my hand tightly in his rough one for a long moment, and when he releases it, I find a ten-dollar bill pressed into my palm. I don't even remember to say *děkuji*, I'm so astonished.

He comes to our house, but he does not come inside. With his penknife, he slices a small limb from the Bartlett pear in our front yard to take home with him. "I wish he'd take the whole tree," my mother whispers. He refuses to stay for supper, and my father insists on driving him back to Thurston in our car, with Mother and me following behind in grandfather's old Plymouth. The doctor forbade him to drive years ago because of his heart trouble. "Stubborn old fool," my mother mutters as she drives.

I've never held a ten-dollar bill in my hand before. "Is Grandpa rich?" I ask.

"Yes," she says, her voice clipped. Then after awhile, she says, "But he wasn't always." She tells me tersely, without emotion, how he came to Nebraska from Bohemia when he was sixteen, was clever enough to make friends with the Winnebagos by trading corn, chickens, and dogs for the chance to work their soil. She tells me how he earned enough to send for my grandmother's passage from the homeland to America, how he prospered, then lost everything he'd ever earned when the banks closed during the Great Depression. How he earned it all back and more. By the time he retired from farming, he owned so much land my four uncles are still the wealthiest farmers in Thurston County. "He got them all started," she says.

"So he wasn't rich when you were little?"

"No. We were poor, except for the land, While my mother worked beside him in the fields, the eleven of us kids did all the other work, and we had to take care of each other. By the time I was eight, I was responsible for all the haircuts. We all quit school in eighth grade—except the youngest ones, Marty and Helen—to work at home. We all moved out by the time we were sixteen."

For a while, we ride in silence. I finally ask her. "Why did he take the limb from off the pear tree? He doesn't even grow pear trees."

"It's a seeded fruit like apples," she says. "He's determined to try it, I suppose."

I never did learn to speak the Czech language with much success beyond a few memorized poems, some scattered words and phrases, a few songs. My grandfather fell ill from a stroke that summer. We had no family reunion.

I sat beside my mother, among my six aunts, one hot day in September in the steamy kitchen of Aunt Blanche's house on her acreage near Thurston. She's the eldest of the eleven and has always lived alone. "My arthritis just about kills me most of the time, or else he'd be welcome here," she told the group of women circling her kitchen table with arms and elbows braced against the red and white checkered oilcloth that stuck cloyingly to my skin.

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"He'll need a lot of care, nursing care," Aunt Helen, who lives in Oregon, told them. "Around the clock."

"I have my hands full with Joey." My Aunt Irene.

"Our place is so darned small." Aunt Sylvia.

"If only I weren't working fulltime . . ." Aunt Marty.

"Well, he'll have to live with someone. He won't be able to live alone anymore." Aunt Helen.

"With us?" I looked at my mother at the head of the table.

"I'm too old to care for an invalid." She was annoyed. "It's nursing care he needs. And besides, where in the world would we put him?"

My grandfather's yellow stuccoed house in Thurston with its orchard of apples left rotting that year on the trees, his bright white row of hives, angrily teeming with honeybees, were sold off at auction that fall to pay for his nursing care in the Logan Valley Rest Home near Lyons, halfway between Thurston and Omaha.

I visited him there a few times, but I was growing up, and my parents no longer required my company wherever they went. The first stroke, then smaller ones that followed, affected his speech—he spoke not at all to anyone—and paralyzed most of his body. The hardening arteries and heart disease had been doing their work surreptitiously for years before felling the man. He lay strapped to his bed in that white room, grip feeble, square owl-face thin and blanched, hollow eyes silently riveted on my downturned face. I patted his hand—no longer rough but waxen now—before I left his side.

I was planning to visit again as soon as my first semester in college was over. I had a job too, at Woolworth's, to put myself through school. One evening, while I was doing my homework, my mother phoned my apartment to tell me my grandfather was slipping in and out of consciousness, failing rapidly. The family had been burdened by his lingering condition, since proceeds from the auction were gone along with any inheritance divided earlier among the clan. My parents were forced to dip into their retirement account these past months to help pay for his care. The relief in her voice was apparent, "I was with him last night, but he doesn't know me."

A week later, sitting at my kitchen table studying for a linguistics exam, I experienced without warning the flash of an image upon my consciousness—a sharp, visual image of my grandfather's form. He was strapped to a white bed in a white room while two nurses held him down. He struggled again and again to raise himself, but finally, after futile attempts to lift himself from the bed, he submitted to their strength.

The image so unnerved me I argued with it, argued against my feelings, my knowledge. Yet the vision thrust itself again and again against those fears and denials, until I had to stand to clear my head. I looked at the clock, poured a cup of coffee. I tried to continue studying, but I couldn't. Finally, uneasily, I went to bed.

At seven-thirty the next morning, the phone rang, pulling me from sleep. "Your grandfather is gone," my mother said. "He passed away last night."

"I know," I told her. "At ten o'clock."

"Yes. At ten o'clock."

I was astonished. "But don't you think it's strange I should know that?" I launched quickly into my experience of the evening before.

When I finished, she said softly, "I'm not too surprised. When we were young on the farm, he told us one day his mother had just died. The letter didn't reach us from Prague until a month later."

"You never told me about that."

"I didn't?"

"There's so much you've never told me." I felt abandoned, cut off from something important.

"We've never been ones to talk much, you know."

"I know that," I said, but inwardly I was awed by his cleverness, saddened by his foolishness. □

ALAN FELDMAN

THE LINK

They are all slight of build, these young men, and one of them even looks
Like a delicate version of me. We're here for the birthday
Party of a friend of ours who jumped the tracks. It took
Two marriages: a house and kids in the suburbs which failed
And a second try with a movie actress to convince him he'd wounded
Himself and women enough, and to drop the pretense. For years
He gave teddy bears to kids and girlfriends. Now his bedroom
Is filled with them. And his boyfriend, who cooks, steers
Him around the kitchen in a kissing dance and looks to us
Just like one, round-faced and cuddly. He urges us all to the bar
Hugs my wife repeatedly and has the tact to grab me just
By the hand. Though I do like him. And on the cold walk to our car
We agree our friend's looking young. And the boyfriend deserves to be praised.
Arms linked, we're ready to support any sort of love that stays.

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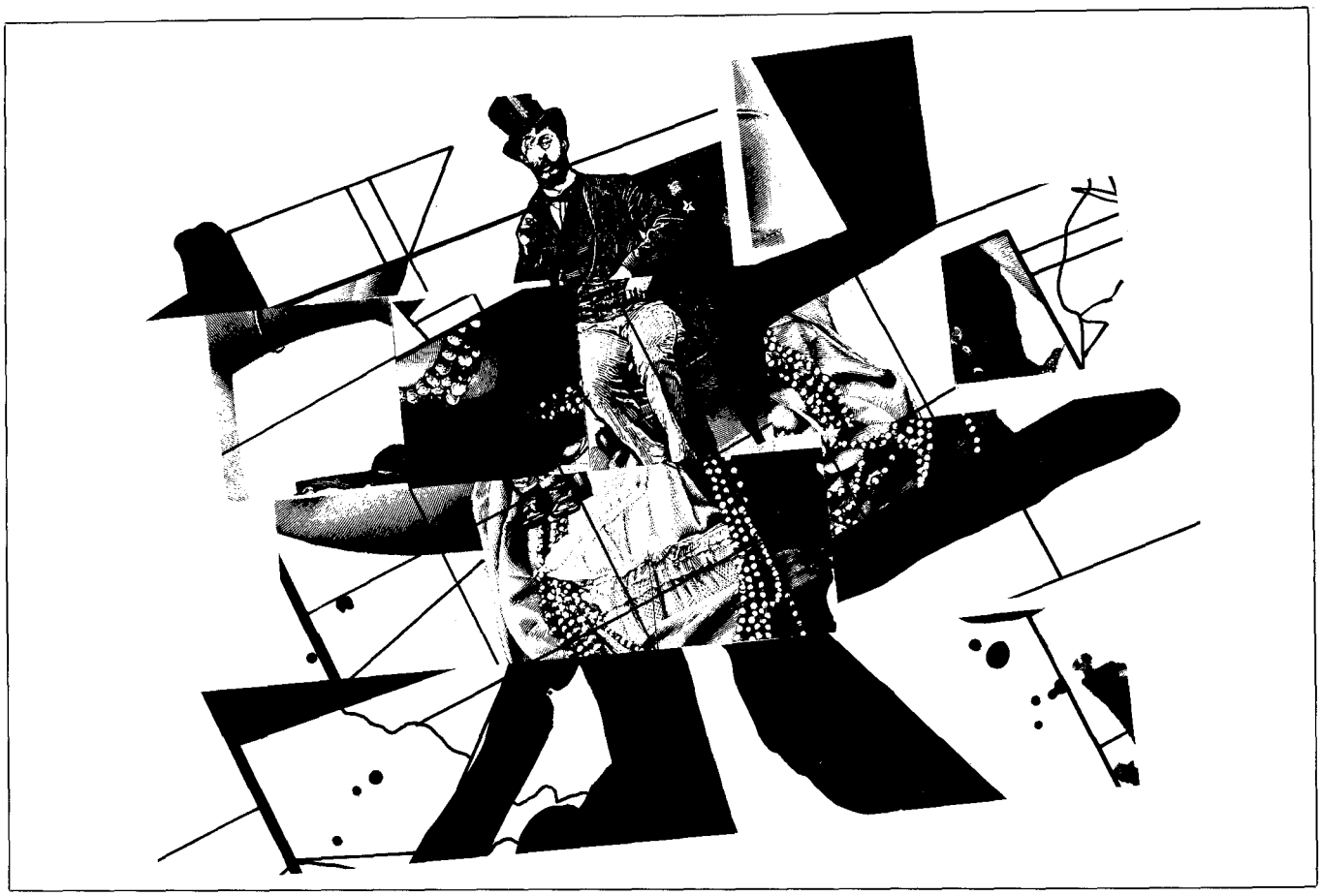
CLANCY SIGAL

ROSE & HER FRIENDS



1. Lunch with Rose

She was already there when I showed up for our annual lunch. Just the two of us, without her son Alex or my wife Elaine. *Mano a mano*. The way she sat, waiting, her still-good legs crossed under the cafe table outside the Regents Park restaurant, her hard dimpled chin cupped in her hand and her eyes focused intently on some invisible object in mid-distance, I figured, Yeah, of course, never a lost moment. Hoping to startle her, I approached from her blind side: I longed for a surprised smile, a pleased exclamation. Instead, she merely swiveled her slightly astigmatic gaze to rest upon me, and I could feel that old momentary icy shiver. As if a deadly sniper had just leveled his weapon at me.

She smiled lazily. And straightened up, the way she used to from her typewriter when I came into her room. Without irritation, swiftly slipping a thought, an image into her memory bank for later use. Once I'd found that maddeningly sexy.

"Oh, hello—I haven't been here long. Don't worry," she greeted me as a friend.

In the action of bending to kiss her, my mind flashed the lowest level of alert. She was, I had to admit, my superior at the game of Old Pals. Already, I could feel myself sliding toes-first into the gentle undertow of her generosity towards me. Rose, I thought. That's why her mother baptized her Rose. Always comes up smelling like.

"Hi, baby," I breathed into her ear, and sat down opposite her under the cocked awning. She winced slightly. Good, she remembered.

Menus in hand like shields, we gave each other a long careful look. In the year we hadn't seen each other alone Rose had fallen down stairs and broken her leg; I'd had a minor operation on my esophagus. Our attitudes to illness were different. She practically seized the chance, I'd found out from her son Alex, to study Sanskrit and also become an expert in homeopathy. I just let it slow me down a little. "I have seen you look better," she decided firmly, grandmaternally.

Oh no, I wasn't having that. "That's because I just got off a plane from Melbourne," I explained, only half-lying. A week ago Elaine and I had returned from a three-week visit to her aged parents in Australia. Immediately I caught myself: Rose would interpret this as complaining in some vague way about Elaine, as if she was tiring me out. "Had a terrific time out there," I asserted loyally.

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"Good. Extraordinary country, isn't it? Aussies more your sort, I imagine."

Hmm. Did that mean the landscape was great but the people ("your sort") somehow less noble? Too late I recalled Rose had once written a short travel book about the outback, titled *Dream Dust*.

As a matter of fact, I explained pompously, Australians are *quite* different from Americans. I started a long political analysis of the Aussie vs. Yank character but trailed off in the face of her studiedly blank expression. "Oh tosh," Rose said with finality, "it has bugger all to do with a class breakdown of the first settlers—it's all that bloody awful *space* that cracks them up."

I had to marvel at Rose. In the fewest possible words she had summed up her "position," as we Reds used to say. She was still the teacher, I the pupil. ("Tosh.") She had finally secured her place as Britain's most active literary Grand Lady—no other way, in the old more insecure days, would she have descended to pub language ("bugger all"). Earthy—fuck, shit, cunt—yes. Matey, never. And she was having no truck with my pitiful attempts to remind us that politics had once been central to our lives. All that was mercifully behind her, an irksome relic of her now-despised radical past. At first, over these lunches, we had argued over it. But then, as she had stubbornly vetoed any further discussion of Alex's girl troubles when they had begun to get out of hand, she had become very angry over my pushing and prodding her over "issues." Grey eyes blazing, thin mouth pressed into a furious slit, she had almost hissed, "Politics is a bad joke. It's primitive thinking. My God, won't you ever grow up?" At the time I'd been truly shocked, as if she had stepped over a thin but dreadful line between being a humorously self-critical Communist and a spiteful renegade. And I felt stupid too: not only because I still clung weakly to the tattered shreds of my old-fashioned socialism—sure proof I had somehow missed the point of our love affair—but that I'd been so slow, as usual, to take seriously her move into Sufism and science fiction. Impulsively I'd blurted, "Aw c'mon kid, you're not still futzing around with that drugstore sheikh of yours?" I meant Ibraham Hassan, a Surrey guru who looked like Valentino and talked like W.C. Fields as The Great Swami. A few years back, in my own search for certainty, I'd sampled the Arab prankster's spiel—mainly dessicated Jewish jokes minus the fast delivery—and got crosseyed with boredom. He had dismissed me by suggesting I return in five years with a one-page report of my spiritual travels, "and then we will see how well you have progressed to simplicity" he added with swarthy pompousness. And this was Rose's new lover!

I knew it degraded her inner psychic development to think of Sheikh Sharpie this way: but it bothered me even more to suspect that Rose was having an infinitely elevated, sexless affair with this guy by way of the ancient Sufi texts. It all came down to that, always. I just didn't believe Rose was capable of Pure Thought, or of philosophic speculation, or spiritual exploration—without at some level also being actively involved sexually. No. Not possible. I was as convinced as ever that I understood Rose, in her irreducibly and hopelessly gross core. But I also knew, from my own Laingean, Sartrean, Zen-Buddhist, Siberian shamanistic "spiritual wanderings," how implacably I had once felt towards anyone who insisted on dragging me back to my own rotten flesh. Wearily, I was sure that—as usual—Rose had somehow gone this route more subtly and wisely than I, but I also recognized the naked anger under the sophisticated world-tiredness, and dropped the subject.

And finally, of course, Rose was staking her claim ("all that space") to knowing a hell of a lot more about the psychological effects of a vast, terrifying countryside than I ever could. She was, after all, African-born, a daughter of the veldt (the title of her first book of short stories). Me, I was Professor Emeritus only of alleys and street corners.

Okay, Rose and I had tagged each other over the lunch table, and it was time to order food.

We chatted, cautiously, about our home lives. Or rather, Rose reeled off the books she had written, prizes awarded, kudos bestowed since we last met. While I told her about the new house, its mortgage and traumas with the gas fitters, moving men, telephone engineers. This was only partly a put-on, my way of telling her how sharply etched in my memory were her laughing predictions, in bed together, that I would one day leave her for "Gwendolyn," a dumb domesticated English rose. The implication was that I wouldn't stand the gaff of her fiery intelligence and would settle for infinitely less. But I also wanted Rose to appreciate my pleasure in not being a bum any more. It wouldn't work, of course. She was committed to me as a reincarnation of James Dean out of Brendan Behan: the ragged-trousered urban cowboy, handsome creature of moods, dark prince of neurosis, stunted Oedipal child. All that had been a drag, especially her loving me for it. I mean, I breathed easier nowadays. Was calmer. Wrote better, more, on deadline. But she was equally devoted to a Rose-made vision of Robert the Unsung Genius of Too Many Words, the blazing literary light hiding itself under a mountain of brilliant but unpublished manuscript. Mountain it was, all right. Mainly of bullshit.

Ritually she said, "Bob, let me find you an editor to organize you. I'll lend you Henry Garfein, if you like." Ha. Hank, as I insisted on calling him to his pasty, pusillanimous face, was her New York editor: a loathsome snob who had once thrown me out of his Madison Avenue office because I'd interrupted his monologue on The Editor as Creative Handmaiden (meaning, boss of my work) by cracking wise that when I needed a handmaiden I'd hire one from a domestic employment agency, what I wanted from an editor was a large advance and plenty of muscle in sales conferences. Now we met only at Rose's increasingly frequent soirées in her large, almost palatial home in Tufnell Park, sorry Highgate Lower Slope. Rose loved our mutual hatred, it was for her the last flicker of my old punch-them-in-the-mouth swagger (in fact, I *had* punched her publisher in the mouth years ago) and was yet another indication of Hank Garfein's fastidious, female taste.

I understood why, after all the years of small recognition for large endeavor that Rose had endured from publishers and award-givers, she was basking in the

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admiration of fawning courtiers like Garfein. But my old Rose would once have dismissed him with a curl of her lip and a flippant, "Jumped-up office boy with a head for figures and a sure instinct for cultural fashion," which is how she used to describe her present English publisher, Howard. I'd rather liked Howard, a born spiv but ruthlessly transparent. The existence of Garfein reminded me of how dependent I was, in the last analysis, like most "English" writers, on American cash and push.

I surprised myself by not replying to Rose with an equally ritualistic insult aimed at Garfein. Why was I so suddenly sensitive? God, she takes this creep seriously, I thought. It suddenly struck me how lonely she was, really cut off, if she was plugged into characters like Garfein for her soul-electricity. Cut off from what? Ach, bloody nonsense all this. Rose was as lonely and alienated as that ash tree over by the pond. She was having a whale of a good time being Next in Line for the Nobel Prize.

So we sat, munching our salads under the awning, her Hank Garfein at daggers drawn with my Elaine Wasserman, like invisible seconds in a permanent duel.

Coffee came almost too soon.

"When are you off to America then?" Rose asked.

In a week or so, I said.

"I couldn't bear to do it," she said. "Visiting Professor. Teaching. Occasional lecturing is bad enough. How do you stand it?"

I was almost afraid to say how much I enjoyed it, it might make me sound less of a writer. "Oh, it's okay," I said gruffly. "Where else do they pay you to take a vacation from writing?"

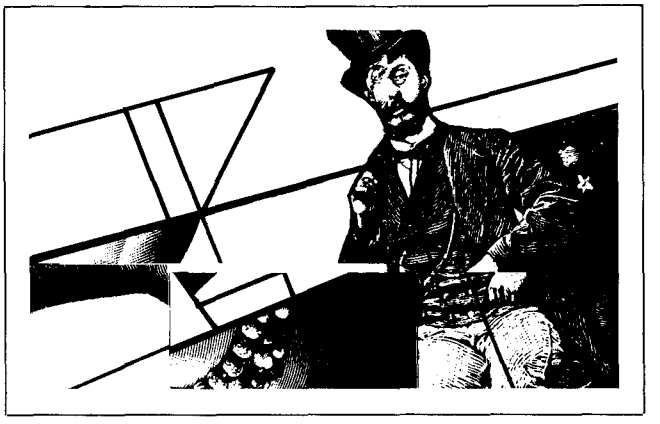
"Yes, darling, I know. But all those illiterate, charming dunces with names we only give dogs in England—Kathy, Debbie, Nancy, Carly, Jody. Ee ee ee ee. Especially the Kathies. It's as if all your old girlfriends had read only one book, *Wuthering Heights*. They're all so earnest—especially the feminists. Christ preserve me."

Rose emphatically disowned her spiritual/political daughters of "The Movement." She volubly poked fun at their illiterate literalness in using her novels as feminist tracts. She said she couldn't stand how they idolized her. It bothered her enormously, I think, to bear the heavy burden of once having lighted a path forward for women which she herself now felt to be a false trail. She blamed Americans for this. If only they'd read her more sensitively, with a greater awareness of the ironic complexities. It had always irked her, this dangerously naive yearning by "all" Americans for precise answers to inexact questions. Back in the shabby old Hammersmith maisonette we once shared, I always used to accuse her of being a racist on two counts: *all* Yanks were like this or that, and her confession that in all the years she had worked closely with the African nationalists she'd never slept with a black guy. "You're a goddam white settler's daughter," I'd yelled in the kitchen one morning after a particularly bad night together, "and all you know is how to treat blacks and Yanks like houseboys!" That was unfair of me about the Africans: the ex-Detention Order leaders-in-exile who kept coming to the house leered and had big bellies. They hated me playing bodyguard.

But, based on an affair with a blacklisted Hollywood writer (and *he* was Canadian), Rose yammered on and on about American infantilism, greed, boastfulness, mama dependence, and naked bloody egoism. "Did you call my name?" I'd ask playfully. But she wasn't playing, sodding bitch.

Rose was now rich enough to own a town house, a cottage in Windermere and a little French hideaway in the Languedoc. I didn't see her turning down any U.S. royalties.

I understood about acolytes. I could have screwed myself to death with all the American feminists who looked me up as a way of knowing Rose. (They all agreed I was the "Paul Blue" of her trail-breaking novel *Loose Leaves from a Random Life.*) My best ploy, when asked in hushed tones about Rose, was to say, truthfully: "She's a fuckin-A great cook." Not once had any American woman smiled or laughed; they all got very hot and insulted, seeing the crack as 100% evidence that Paul Blue hadn't changed his spots. Still, Rose's dismissal of her followers bothered me. She made such a big thing of it at first, I believed it was just her harmless way of drawing attention to her American success. Now I wasn't sure. She *did* want to lead—no matter what she said, her political like her sexual drive was still there. But only where she wanted. Politics, I kept saying, wasn't like that.



Or, rather, I *used* to say, before we banned that too from our narrowing range of permitted conversation. Politics, sex, feminism, Alex, the news—out. Taboo also was even gossip about old friends. Was Lady Rose above all this now? She who had taught me to come off my high horse and wallow in all the sordid details of everyone's life and enjoy the delicious activity of carving up our nearest and dearest instead of—as I'd done the first few weeks together—coming on like Leslie Howard in "Gone With The Wind," all high-minded and phoney southern gentleman. She had fed on gossip like a raven. What was nourishing her now?

All that was left to talk about, Christ, was travel and books—and my wife. Rose liked probing there a little, just to keep in practice, I suppose. Not on principle, but out of sheer viciousness, I loved stonewalling Rose about Elaine. I hoped that, as in the past, Rose would interpret my close-mouthedness as proof of a terrific sex life there. It lent spice to an otherwise dull "exchange of views."

I hated meeting Rose as if we were Communist and American generals in the armistice tent at Panmunjon.

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Guarded about the trade secrets of our inmost lives. It was a big, felt loss for me. She was, when all was said and done, my best non-fucking woman friend in England. I didn't mind the divorce, I had even got used to the distance, emotionally. But she was an indelible part of my bloodstream. We didn't "owe" each other a thing. Except faithfulness to that funny old whatever-it-was we once shared.

I often had a sense that whichever of us gave up on the other first would also die first.

So, once or twice a year, Rose came over to have a meal with Elaine and me. Every now and then I dropped in on Rose's Big Name shindigs. (Elaine sternly refused to come any more. We had too many fights afterwards.) And, like the 4th of July or Thanksgiving, this lunch.

What do you talk about when you have nothing to talk about?

The past was out, so was most of the present. However, there was always, The Future.

Rose was into the future in a big way. That's when I fell off her literary wagon. If only to keep tabs on the opposition, I made a point of always buying her books—in hardback, mind—as soon as they came out. My way of staying in touch with her, I guess. Frankly, I'm not a great fan, except of the African stories and of course *Loose Leaves*. She's a terrific writer but a little too, well, heavy. Great sense of fun, in life. But I don't see too many of her jokes on the page.

This is especially so of the new, sci-fi stuff. I fell off *that* space ship when I was 14, with *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Marvelous Tales*. Matter of taste, really. As soon as I crack open the book and discover the hero is named Gurgul and lives on Lunopolis my eyelids start involuntarily to flutter, snzzz. So I know about Rose's new direction—the linked series of novels about catastrophe and after—from the reviews. Her message I get straight from the filly's mouth, so to speak. We're all doomed. Not a hope. Optimism is the cowardice of blind idiots or Blimpish socialists like me. Atomic holocaust, antinuclear protest is futile, worse it's unrealistic: civil defense, that's the ticket. Well the old gel may be right, probably is, but screw it, Rose and I once got arrested together at Brize Norton U.S. Air Force base for trying to scale a wire fence and distribute CND leaflets; we enjoyed the fight. Rose in her new apocalyptic mode just reminds me of her old domestic battle tactics back in Hammersmith. I'd schlump in, soaking wet and dead beat, from an all-night boozup or poker game or "affair" as she used to call my quickies, and there she was, chain-smoking and pretending to study the morning newspaper in the kitchen, and my heart broke for her. Really. "Well," she'd snarl, keeping those thin lips of hers clasped together like a virgin's knees, "do you want breakfast—or have you already enjoyed something to eat?" Emphasis on enjoyed.

And, on a weary nod from me, she'd rustle up one of her special cinemascopic breakfasts. Like she was trying to sink me with food. Warm home-baked bread, Rose-preserved strawberry jam, hot strong coffee (from the Venezuelan mountain beans I liked and she trekked all the way to Golders Green to get), bacon streaky crisp, three sunnyside-up eggs with the yolk slightly runny, butcher-fresh (not Walls) sausages, grilled tomatoes, *News-Chronicle* and *Daily Worker* at the side of my plate. A banquet. Often followed by a digestive screw, sometimes on the kitchen floor. For some reason, these absolution breakfasts she cooked got us both excited as hell. Who knows, maybe she was trying to kill me with a premature coronary?

And then we'd drop like stones into sleep in her workroom—Rose's way of saying I came before her writing. Untrue, but brief music to my ears.

Of course, all this was preliminary to the main bout.

We both knew the drill so well there was almost a ceremonial sumo bow when an imaginary starting bell clanged. "Ah, darling," she'd squirm in my sleepy arms, "why do you *do* it?" Brrnng. Our next moves were practiced and hurtful. "It" wasn't just the occasional girlfriend. That we could have settled in five minutes. Within twenty-four hours of our first embrace, and that had happened in like ten seconds flat of my agreeing to rent the room she had vacant in Hammersmith, I had told her what my habits were. Stupidly, I had called it "freedom," and that's probably where I went wrong, putting a provocative label on it instead of just saying that's it, that's what I do, take it or leave it. If only she had objected at the time . . . But that was not her style. She stored it up, suffering in chilly dignity and mounting fury, until her incredibly focused rancor perfectly matched my almost childlike terror. What had I done wrong anyway?

Worst, our voices seldom raised, no blows were struck. Insults got delivered in cold blood. I'd never fought in this way with a woman before, with such elegant venom. Screaming rows almost instantly followed by woozy makeups or abrupt separation were more my style. Rose may not have got me dead to rights on The Woman Question, but I trusted her to know the score about my headaches and vertigo and literary blocks. "It's your bloody Los Angeles compartmentalization," she hissed between tobacco-stained, uncared for teeth. (And *why* did she never pull the lavatory chain?) "Your soul is like one of those movie sets you used to work on. Everything functions out of continuity, a scene here a scene there, but it never adds up to anything, does it, darling? My poor lost Bobby." When she called me Bobby—it was normally Rob—I cringed waiting for the heavy flak.

She was right. That's just how it felt, every time I sat down to my old Corona portable. Meanwhile, to keep myself afloat, the old juices going, sane, I behaved the same with Rose as I'd always done with women. "Loyalty," she intoned like a Chief Justice at the Old Bailey putting the black handkerchief on his head before pronouncing sentence, "loyalty is foreign to you, isn't it? I mean, how *can* you be faithful to me when I'm your damn mother every time."

And then, instead of cursing me, she'd pour down upon my aching head a witch's cauldron of Jungian epithets and Freudian pronouncements that petrified the awed-of-doctors Jewish kid in me. All the psychoanalytical b.s. I'd easily brushed off in the States, I soaked up from Rose like a blotter. She was no stoolpigeon or renegade like so many people I knew in the States who were

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turning to the man behind the couch, himself sometimes an FBI agent, for moral comfort. Why, Rose could quote Lenin back at me smartish. For dignity's sake, I struggled back. Crap and utter nonsense, I yelled. That may be your old lovers you're talking about; it's not me. Wise up baby, don't blame me for Vratislav's brutality. (Vrat, as she called him, was my bad luck—the guy she'd been allegedly sunk on just before I walked onto the set . . . I mean, moved in with her.) Our first night together, still coupled, we had exchanged modern vows, her by spilling it all out about Vrat the Czech Communist writer's coldly abrupt walkout on her and Alex after a four-year relationship, me by demanding the aforesaid freedom. I'd said, raised up on my elbows and smiling seriously down into her small grey eyes, here's the deal. ("Deal deal. You have a Communist head but a capitalist heart," she later taxed me with my ex-Sunset Strip terminology.) If, when we bust up and Alex has formed an attachment to me, I promise, on my mother's honor (Rose never let me forget *that* slip either) not to abandon him as Vrat and, before Vrat, his own natural father had. I know what it's like for a boy raised only by his mother, I know. You may not be able to count on me. But Alex can.

That was the—excuse the expression—deal. At least as I understood it.

And, for the next several years, through all the hailstorms of separations and reconciliations, rows and assaults on our inner lives, awful infidelities and absurd tricks, I stuck with Alex. Until he was old enough to drink, and he faced me in a Leicester Square pub, pint of bitter in his large healthy hand, and said, "Ma says you're too crazy for me, and that you'll endanger me without even meaning to, Rob. The worst thing I could do now is leave Ma and come live with you—though thanks for the invite, old boy. I got to go now. Sorry. Goodbye." He'd walked out on me. It hurt, still does: he's my son, in a way, the child Rose and I never had and sometimes talked about her untying her tubes for. He's a lot in my dreams even now. The little bastid.

So don't tell me about Rose's prophetic gifts, or her sullenly despairing view of the Future. I've been there and survived it. To hell with civil defense.

As we split the check—I knew she still loved me a little from the way she first grabbed it with a breezy, "Come on, Bobby, it's easier for me to do this" followed by an almost flirtatious toss of her now-graying head to see how I was taking it—we had a little spat, of course. Over homeopathy versus surgery as the wisest way to cure her arthritic leg and my bollixed gut. Her latest sure-fire absolutely certain 100% effective least harmful nostrum was a paste of garlic, pressed daffodils and Spanish onions, taken with camomile tea and a few tiny pills she offered to let me try. "But that's for a busted leg," I protested. "I've got a bad stomach." She stood up, adjusted her skirt and blouse—thank god with the top two buttons undone, showing plenty of cleavage—and looked me coolly in the eye.

"You still compartmentalize, don't you," she smiled tolerantly. "Ah well, take care of yourself, darling. There aren't too many of us left any more, are there?" □

2. An Abuse of Hospitality

Rose O'Malley isn't responsible for her fans. Yet I blame her for Sally Wilner and her doting husband Randal.

The Wilners are big in Los Angeles culture. Make that Beverly Hills, the tarantula—as Raymond Chandler might have said—on the slice of angel food cake that is LA. Sally, after publishing her obligatory "mad housewife" novel *Domestic Affairs,* which she dedicated to me (ha!), has just published a respectably solid biography of Mrs. Clarence Darrow, revealing the great lawyer's wife—according to the NYTimes review—as a person in her own right. On TV chat shows, on her book jackets and in identifying italics next to her articles in *Ms.* or *Village Voice,* Sally is termed "a leading young feminist, historian, housewife and mother." A full, well-ordered life.

Her husband Randal—never Randy—is a sort of impresario of liberal and feminist causes. He gives money, time, energy. As a prematurely retired TV producer whose several sitcom series, before he shrewdly sold out to a conglomerate, were as successful as Norman Lear's, Randal has plenty of all three. He belongs to ACLU, NAACP, the Nation Associates, Institute of Policy Studies and several charity boards; his name often appears among the massed signatories of expensive anti-war ads in the LATimes.

The Wilners are Good People. That's why I let them persuade me to hide out in their funky, creeper-covered house behind the Beverly Hills Hotel in the spring of '67. "We believe in your talent and imagination," said Randal, squatting uncomfortably crosslegged on the floor of my London apartment stripped by me of all its furniture. "Let us help you," Sally added feelingly.

Rose had put the Wilners on to me. She had sent me a note—my phone was deliberately cut off—that arrived only minutes before the Southern California couple did. All it said was, "Rich American lefties may descend on you. Wilners. My suggestion. More your cuppa. Love, Rose" in her hasty, tiny scrawl. By itself Rose's intro was

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no surprise. Even long after we split up we never stopped the habit of exchanging visitors we couldn't cope with or thought the other might find more interesting. Over the years I'd send Rose the kind of Yanks she found "interesting": cops, crapshooters, Chicago writers. Rose redirected to me French lady intellectuals, central European Marxists and collapsed schizophrenics: she knew my tastes. But, even for Rose, I found the Wilners a trifle, er, unusual.

She was spiffing, he was a toad. My very first impulse was to rescue her from this unbelievably ugly little man. Imagine a Jewish Gloria Steinem and that's Sally, a Roman-nosed, oliveskinned slimhipped LA lollapalooza. Warm and wide-eyed to boot. (That should have warned me.)

Lounging gracefully sidesaddle on my uncluttered but vastly luxurious iron-grey pile rug, she drilled me right through my broken-down heart with her large, staring brown eyes. Her wide, generous lips were always slightly parted, as if she had a touch of Magic Mountain asthma or was just starting an orgasm. She positively glistened with self-excitement.

"Rose O'Malley told us you'd be just like this," she breathed admiringly. "And we're not disappointed," Randal said more soberly but with intense sincerity. Fucking Rose, what was she saying about me now? I asked.

"Rose said you were terminating a spiritual pilgrimage. You are a born risk-taker. Having done your heroic task of clearing a forest of its tall trees, you are tired. You need a rest," Randal said as if reading *Daily Variety's* box-office revenue column. "Anything you want from us we are prepared to give," Sally murmured invitingly.

Bats, I thought. They're absolutely round the twist. (As soon as this neon message flashed across the blank white screen nailed inside my frontal cranium—during my "episode" I had lost the power of normal speech but cleverly had learned to reel off neon communiques in less than a shout—I knew I was getting better. A month before, I'd have been sure the Wilners were Messengers of the Unknown Demiurge "sent" to kidnap me away from My Mission.)

I kicked them out. And forgot all about the Wilners until the hallucinations came back, that winter. Dear God, when will it end? The whimwhams caught me by surprise. I had been making such lonely progress back to sanity. Suddenly I got very scared. I felt stuck midway. Without the scarce, cold comforts of madness, without the stabilizing numbness of real life.

All morning I spent climbing, according to my self-authored Emergency Mission Manual, out of my monk's robe, in precise and numbered stages, and into Infidel Raiments, jeans and t-shirt. To go downstairs one flight into a phone box to make a transatlantic, collect call to the Wilners.

Forty-eight hours later I was a distinguished guest in their Beverly Hills home.

They did their best, at first. Sally gave up her spacious, airy work-study (next to the pool) as my bedroom, relinquished her IBM for me to write on. Randal, after failing to force money on me, insisted I have all my meals with them, freely use their phone, maid and laundry service. (The maid, from Honduras, was paid double the going rate, Randal assured me. "And we make sure she attends language classes," Sally confirmed.) Their kid, a six-year-old girl, Mandy, hated me on sight, but after I kicked her good and hard under the dinner table she kept out of my way. Copies of all of Rose's books were liberally sprinkled around the loft—as if that would make me feel any better.

And then we all settled in snugly together.

Okay, it was impossible. I wasn't *that* crazy I couldn't see it. But it was my safest port in the mental storm.

I had to be contained. Nothing else. I craftily figured, fizz crackle and pop goes my over-indulged brain but at least the backdrop here is also crazy. I'll fit in, no one will notice. Back in London I was Mister Sore Thumb. In Beverly Hills, who's mad?

In some detail, at their expense, I had explained all this on the long distance phone call, and again two days later in Randal's Mercedes convertible on the way in from LAX where they'd picked me up. In this leather-smelling direct descendant of Rommel's staff car they had listened intently. Sally's lips parted, Randal nodded wisely. "Even saints need R&R," he said. But he wasn't kidding.

Somewhere along the line, probably from me with an assist from Rose (who had received Sally from Hank Garfein, her publisher), the Wilners had tuned in to my zany pretensions. I was sure Rose had sent them to me in gleeful malice, as if to say, Here's an accurate mirror of your phoniness, if you can stand the Wilners, you're hopeless. Today, when I remind Rose, she just looks blank. She would.

So the Wilners had a Saint living with them. For a few days I gave them what they wanted, pure wisdom and plenty of opaque Zen aphorisms. I was quiet, reserved, dignified. But how long could that last?

Los Angeles, as it always did, filled me with thick pulsing urgent fluid. The smog and decrepit palm trees and freeways do to me what the subway's roar does to a true native New Yorker: gave me a high to add to my high. My long-dormant engines sparked and coughed. My mental exhaust pipe blew out five years of accumulated sludge. I felt ready—too ready, too soon—to go. Not from the Wilners, oh no, but somewhere up and out so long as I had their base to return to at night—or, as it turned out, in the mornings. To make it easy for me, Randal loaned me his extra extra car, a T-bird with almost no miles he'd fallen out of love with.

Grudges blossomed. I ignored them. My legs needed more time to steady.

Sally's habitual stare bothered me. Wide-eyed appeared to be an ocular rather than existential state for her. She sat, or rather posed, on the enormous brown suede three-cornered couch, one hand massaging Randal's thick neck, the other on Mandy's shoulder, God's Mother, and drank in my most offhand remarks as if they were the very pith of Truth Revealed. She kept shaking her lovely slender neck and marveling, "Isn't he fabulous?" as if I wasn't even in the room. Randal sat there beaming like an understuffed Buddha, waiting for an

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inner glow. Mandy just looked as if she'd like to spit at me.

It all got on my nerves. My job was to get better, but the Wilners' enthusiasm for my saintly superiority was not going to help. Yet it was my rent for continued residence.

I didn't have the energy to move out, that was the start and end of it. The deal was too good, really. Randal was out all day tying up the loose ends of his deal with Rocky Mountain Security, the conglomerate he was selling out to. Mandy went to a private school above Laurel Canyon. My best time was between breakfast *en famille* and when Sally returned from driving Mandy to school in her custom-built Porsche. Ninety minutes, two hours maybe, of peace and quiet, when I rattled off thousands and thousands of words in my journal: it was my second best way of letting off this painful head of steam still whooshing through my circuits. The IBM golfball machine went as fast as my Maserati mind, pages flew, soon grew into a stack at the foot of the typewriter stand. As the pile rose, so did Sally's bile.

I knew that look. I'd had it once, lounging against Rose's half-open door as she pounded away on her novels. Pure murder. The glare of the not-yet-equipped for the smoothly working journeyman. Craft, one would kill for it.

"Coffee, tea or me?" Sally said one morning after depositing her brat. As usual she was leaning, in awed respect, against the door jamb, ogling me apparently producing on her machine what she had so far failed at. (How could she know my 7000 or more words a day were almost pure nonsense, the terrified thoughts of a wounded bird hovering uncertainly over reality?) I was still hallucinating easily then, as a shorthand to myself. Sally blink oxygen suit blink dying of suffocation blink stabbing me in chest with her air-nozzle blink breathing deep and fast blink I slump comatose over metal stand where IBM used to be blink blink blink. Sally repeated her question until it sank in.

Jesus. Sure I'd considered it. More than once. No scruples. Just animal instinct said a big N-O.

"If you don't sleep with me I'll make trouble."

Bingo. My shaman's eyes glanced off hers for a second. She was out for blood. Think, Rob.

"Not under your husband's roof," I replied piously.

Sally lowered her eyes, a rare event. Was she laughing behind those sensuous lids?

She didn't touch me. Carefully I put a plastic cover on the IBM, as if hooding the eyes of a cobra. *Think.*

"It's forbidden," I said.

Flip, up went the long prom-queen lashes. She looked a little puzzled.

Holden wouldn't like it, I thought I said. Holden? I made sounds. "The sobbing serpents say their rosary."

Huh? I could almost hear her exhale. Temporarily it stopped her. She retreated into the immense kitchen to tell Isabella, the maid, about dinner that night. But she was a smart cookie, and came back. "You're not crazy any more. Isabella's going shopping. I called for a taxi to take her down to the Gran Mercado, for spices. That's enough time."

Shit, she wasn't buying it any more. Had she ever?

I played my last card from the shaman's pack. Moving very close to her I reached out and shut the door so departing Isabella couldn't give evidence in court. (Who knew what wild deal Sally and Randal were party to?) I leaned my now-sallow, gaunt face very near hers; I used my eyes as searchlights of her soul. Then I gave her my schizophrenic eagle-fleagle double whammy spear-in-the-iris look. She didn't even bother to duck. Where had all her softness gone?

Just as she reached out for me I punched open the door and screamed for help, "Isabella!" That did it. With a look of 24-karat hate Sally stepped away.

Then the taxi came and within seconds the maid had made her getaway. She knew what was going on, but she was as scared as me.

All the to-ing and fro-ing put Sally off her stroke—for a few seconds.

I insisted we go out into the sun-blasted patio for a walk. Before Sally could say no, I grabbed my sun glasses and took off, she galloping loudly down the Japanese-stone path after me. Keystone Kops had nothing on us. I walked out the front gate (gnarled, sculptured black-wrought iron), she walked faster; I trotted down the deserted street, she ran; I sprinted, she went hell for leather. I wasn't in shape, she went to an expensive gym near Rodeo Drive three times a week. On Sunset Boulevard and the canyon road I collapsed on a bench in the bus shelter.

She came and sat next to me. She took my hand in hers. The dry warm air did marvels for her complexion.

"If not today—tomorrow," she said briskly, flouncing away in her white shirt, white tennis shorts and spotless tennis shoes.

That night the Wilners made a dinner party. Some friends in, they said. As hostess, Sally was perfection. Randal was genial host, liberal with wine (from the temperature-controlled tiled cellar under—yes, under—the swimming pool where, Randal boasted, he kept $20,000 worth of imported stuff) and talk. This was not the slightly dour, heavyhanded pair I knew: they positively flew in company. I drag them down, I thought, but that's their lookout. The guests had been specially invited for me. A psychoanalyst, his therapist wife, a mental health social worker, a lawyer with a schizophrenic son. Just what I needed.

The worst part was Sally. Halfway through dinner she stopped chattering to cup her long, dark face in her hand, her elbow resting an inch above the table, and gazed at me in loud silence. She cocked her head this way and that as if contemplating the best way to carve up a Peking duck. She kept smiling oddly. Such behavior I was used to from young, florid English schizos: their families strenuously ignored them at dinner table to keep a semblance of normality. The oddest thing was the Wilners' guests. They must have all seen Sally's I-love-him-so-even-if-he's-breaking-my-heart-the-lovely-bastard act but paid no heed. It was the way they gave it no attention that bothered me: not a stiff English-style eyes averted from a messy subject, but as if it was all part of a gorgeous domestic scene. Randal's soft wet eyes often sought his

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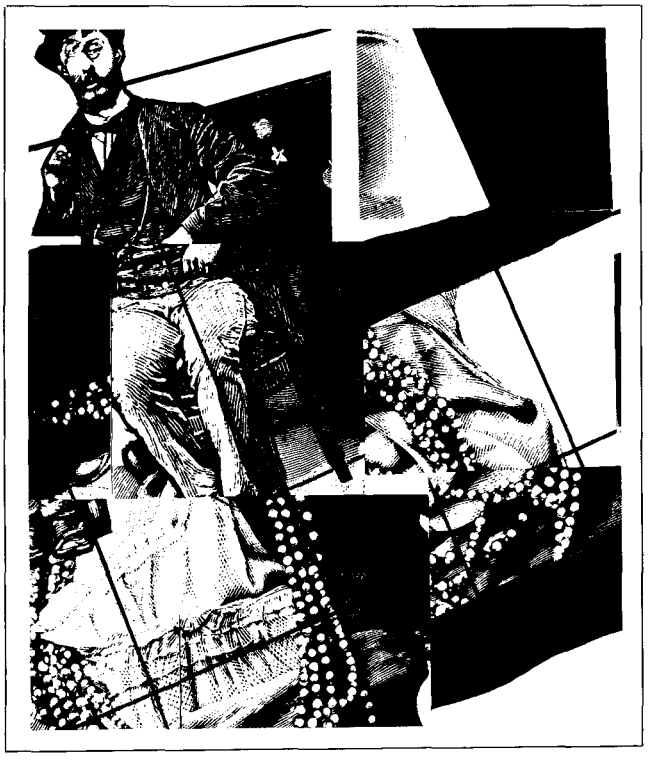
wife's in love and approval. Were they enjoying a joint breakdown? I wondered.

Suddenly Sally got up and strolled around to my chair. Everyone kept chatting about the Black Panthers and the price of LA real estate. I was afraid to turn my head because Sally was right behind me. A knife in the back of my neck? A loud accusation of rape? Under my silk shantung shirt (borrowed from Randal) my body felt soaked with sweat. Voices stilled, eyes shifted to a point just above my rigidly motionless head. Cold bouillabaisse all over me, that was what it was going to be.

"Good friends," Sally's imperative voice got their attention. "This is a special night for Randal and I. We are deeply grateful for the privilege of having Robert Wasserman in our home—for as long as he cares to stay with us . . ."

I felt intensely embarrassed. Sally's speech—punctuated by Randal's hearty 'Hear hear!'—praised me to the skies as the heir to Bruno Bettelheim, a worthy successor to R.D. Laing, an American Brill. (Who?) I dared not turn my head. The guests kept nodding enthusiastically all through Sally's oration, Randal was genuinely moved, no one seemed to squirm. California, I thought. Boy, have I come to the right place.

I almost jumped off the chair when I felt her hand on my shoulder. I was scared. Then her hand, as she spoke, gently slipped down my back and began to massage it, as she so often did to Randal's neck, suggestively. Sally was



calling my bluff. No one else seemed to notice. Or if they did, it was okay by them. My inflamed, unbalanced mind suddenly pictured the next scene: all of us naked and arguing over Sullivanian therapy on the dinner table. I forced myself to sit still.

Party piece over, Sally serenely sailed back to her place at the end of the table and seated herself with regal composure. From that moment on she paid not a second's attention to me—not did any of the others. Chatter resumed, about the last Godard film and whether parents should selfishly sacrifice their child's welfare to adult ideals by sending him to public school where he might get mugged. Suddenly I was no longer there.

My internal warning buzzed: Scram. As politely as I could I pushed back my chair, made an excuse, and fled. No one noticed.

Outside, on the dark gravel driveway, my heart pounded like a trip-hammer. I hadn't been this scared even when fighting off a 250-pound adolescent schizz armed with a butcher knife in London's Meditation Manor. I needed a drink, bad.

Like a bank robber I jumped into the T-bird and streaked for freedom; pure instinct brought me to Venice just south of Santa Monica on the beach. In a cantina-type bar where I toyed with a double Wild Turkey a young woman came and asked if she could share my little table. I was so sunk in myself I hardly noticed I was almost the only person in the bar. We began talking, and she took me back to her place, a walkup in a raunchy but shabbily stylish hotel on Ocean Front Walk. I almost didn't start thinking about it until my clothes were off in her bed. I came to. There were long twisted waxen candles burning in brass holders on the wall above our heads. A large colored poster of Lenny Bruce hung ceremoniously between the flickering candles. In the dancing darkness I stared down at my night's companion. She was staring up at Lenny's picture.

"That's what I call a real mensch," she said with abrupt belligerence.

Absolutely, I replied. A great comic.

"You've got brains in your ass," she said, rolling off the bed. She picked up the telephone on her night table and dialed. Then, naked and doing what appeared to be Canadian Air Force exercises with her shoulders, she held a lengthy intimate conversation with her boyfriend. Once or twice I reached over to caress her shoulder. She didn't even bother to shrug me off, just kept on talking and waggling her lovely plump shoulders.

What was American sex etiquette? Obviously I didn't know any more. Where had I gone wrong?

I picked up my clothes and dressed in Marsha's bathroom. Even the Wilners seemed a safer place. When I came out Marsha, in tears now, was still on the phone. She waved me goodbye.

I came back to Beverly Hills at three a.m. Sally and Randal were waiting up. Isabella had cleared away the dishes, the house was thick with leftover cigarette and more exotic smoke.

"Are you sick, Wasserman?" demanded Randal with a new note of authority in his voice.

I apologized for leaving the party. Just a touch of claustrophobia, I said.

"You insulted us. You trampled our guests and their hospitality," Sally snapped.

Before I could respond Randal cut in, his voice hard and metallic. This was a new Randal: it was a little easier to see him hiring and firing joke-writers for his TV sit-

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coms, whipping them into shape when the Nielsens sagged.

"You broke our unwritten rules," Randal said levelly. "I misjudged you. Where is the sensitivity and compassion I perceived in you in England? Nothing you have endured, or may be suffering, justifies betraying us to our friends."

All I did was cop out on a dinner party—I didn't murder six million Jews, I said.

"Killing our hearts is no joke," he said.

Poor Mandy, I suddenly thought.

Neither the Wilners nor I were prepared to give up my refuge, yet. They were proof I was fit for anything normal life delivered. I was a trophy on their living-room wall, a vital sign of their goodness.

Okay, I said. Sally can have back her typewriter. I'll rent one.

Sally shrank back into the couch as if Dracula had just popped out of the coffin. "Perhaps," Randal offered helpfully, "you and Sally can share the typewriter?" Sally looked daggers at her husband.

Randal stood up. "I'm going to bed. Having two such creative people under the same roof has its problems, I assure you."

Leaving Sally and me alone.

Sally said, "You can do what you want. But I won't have your floozies phoning here."

At the door of their bedroom she turned and called, "And you can do your own laundry from now on." And slammed the door.

TEENAGE SON SLAYS WEST SIDE MOTHER, I could see the LA Herald headline.

After that, the Wilners held no more banquets in my honor.

When Sally began ostentatiously to use her and Randal's bedroom to write in—despite acres of other household space—I knew the fix was in. I started getting up earlier to bang on the IBM, and then clearing off (in their car) for the whole day. After a long absence, I began picking up on politics again—I even went on a couple of anti-Vietnam peace marches, down at Civic Center and at Century City, where I also coincidentally spotted Sally and Randal with Mandy on his shoulders carrying a placard 'U.S. TROOPS OUT OF S.E. ASIA!' They ignored me.

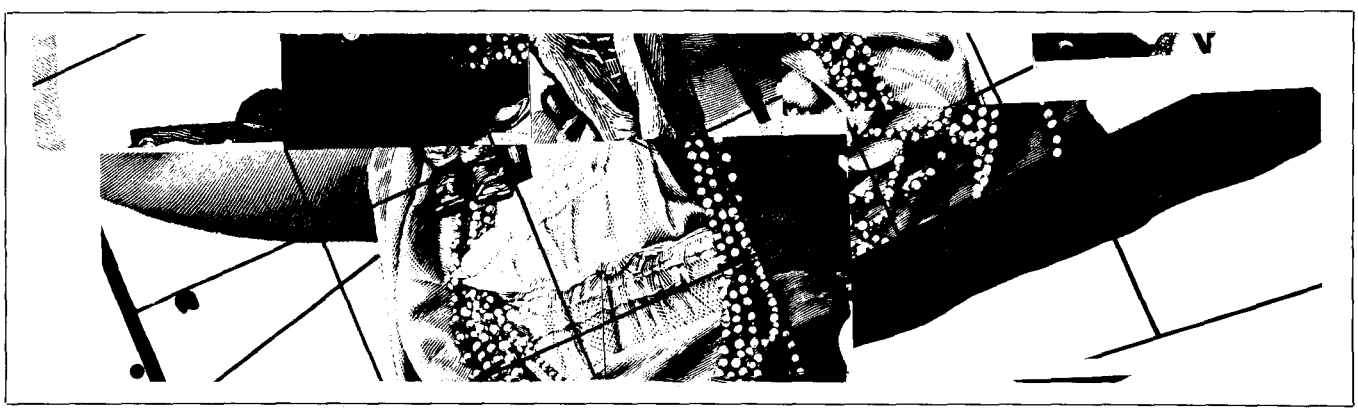
Driving around LA was too much like what I'd done in London to discharge the schizophrenic pus, so I began dating. This was also part of my reality-testing program. Scared of Sally, I needed allies. Pretty soon—from bar pickups, talking to drive-in waitresses and the like—I had a kind of sex map of Los Angeles, which for me had beds instead of surburbs. No one except Sally seemed to mind. She began penciling in little comments on the message pad next to the accumulating phone-back numbers (asking LA ladies not to use a telephone is like asking a snake not to wriggle). *"This one has a terrific voice. Does she charge?"* *"Nancy and I had a talk. Why are you treating her so shabbily?"* Once, a woman actually came to the door asking for me; apparently she wanted to meet the wife she was sure I was hiding. Sally's note read, *"Leah rang our bell. She is very presentable. She doesn't want to see you again after I talked to her."*

Maybe the trouble was I didn't think of it as a sex-life, only a kind of health gymnasium. Like cold showers. It would cool me down, maybe. Instead, it just brought an extra charge of negative electricity into the Wilner mansion. One sure thing. Sally's eyes had slightly narrowed every time she saw me.

Randal made a final stab at friendship. He took me out to Fox studios on Pico, where his old TV production empire had been. Part of his deal with the conglomerate was that he would personally oversee final segments of next season's series. He organized a lunch for me with several of his comedy writers, across from the studio at the Hillcrest Country Club where he was a member. ("Fifty thou to join, a hundred thou in charity pledges," he confided, noting with disapproval my semi-hippie getup. But what the hell, they were all his clothes anyway.) The lunch was not a success. In the middle of the lobster bisque I got up and made a long speech about the role of conglomerate imperialism in the American cultural economy which none of his gag specialists thought in the least funny. On the way back to the house Randal gripped the Mercedes steering wheel and shook his head angrily. "You know, Rob, you'll never forgive me for letting me see you like this."

That night I lay awake in Sally's old work-study now my bedroom. In the dark I "talked" to Rose. We had a bitter argument over what I should do next. But in the morning I packed my few things hurriedly and appeared at the Wilners' breakfast nook in time to catch them before the day started. Sensing something, Sally pushed Mandy into her room, and told Isabella to do the washing.

"You're going then?" Randal said grimly.



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I thanked them both for their hospitality. They sat still as stones. I apologized for any inconvenience. The IBM, the bathroom, the phone. "*De nada,*" Randal said.

It had meant a lot to me, I insisted, using their place as a launching pad back into American literary and political life. I'd stick around town for a bit, to pick up some deals and money. But they should know I knew it hadn't been easy for them. Sally's eyes misted over, as of old: Randal's were clear and hard as ice.

"You've treated me like your own son," I got up from the massive mirror-glass-on-marble-legs breakfast table and shook Randal's unproffered hand. I kissed Sally, who kept staring at me with a new kind of admiration, a deep sea angler tipping her battered chapeau to Old Rob, the one that had got away.

All of them, the whole family, including Mandy and Isabella, stood at the living room picture window looking me across the enormous lawn to the front gate, which I shut firmly behind me. I went around the corner to the hotel taxi rank and jumped into the first cab I saw.

"Hey, paisan," I shouted cheerfully from the back seat. "I used to drive a hack in this town. Show me the sights!" He turned around and said something in Greek or Russian. Well, it would take a little while to square the circle on what that guy was trying to tell me. But it was preferable. Much preferable. □

3. Two Cats on a Mantelpiece

Have you ever fallen for three women at the same time—but they were the same woman?

No, I'm not into schizophrenia again. Just London literary life.

As an old sex warrior, I know how to chew on my lover's hind leg without complaining if it's also done to me. But the thing with Freda Balcon still itches because she used Rose O'Malley to get to me. I was sucker bait.

The patsy who deserves it most is the one who sees it coming and still thinks the percentages are on his side. Freda came on like all the others who wanted to find out about Rose through me: after the first half dozen or so I got to recognize the syndrome. The lightly relaxed introductory phone call, a proper invitation to tea or afternoon drinks, the first innocent inquiry ("And how is dear Rose?"), then the swift rabbit punch which might take the form of anything from blunt, even ugly questions to a guarded probe about my housing needs. I was amazed that once-used material had such re-sale value.

My only excuse is that my guard temporarily was down because of Ray Chalk, the evil ponce.

Ray, Canadian and canny, was my literary rabbi in England. He was the one writer, aside from Rose, who saw what I was trying to do by mixing street reporting with fiction. If nothing else, we were bound by a mutual contempt for critics who dismissed our work as "documentary." But also our paths crossed all the time, in Soho alleys, Notting Hill shebeens, North Circular motorbike cafes. Ray, too, was a sidewalk stalker—but with terrific high style. Me, I slouched around in baggy jeans and any-old sweater; Ray was a Beau Brummel of "social reportage," a fancy word for what we did.

Tall and prematurely whitehaired, he was unafraid to borrow a style (and ideas) from the absolutely-beginning adolescents with whom he hung around in Kilburn and Deptford. He looked like a literate, dandyish Gary Cooper. With his rakishly tilted flat suede cap, toreador-type leather jackets with soft velvet shirts, ultra-tight trousers over nonexistent hips, and wildly buckled tip shoes, he was an unmistakeable pointer to the Swinging London duds of the later Sixties. He was angrily, dangerously gay.

"Stupid of you not to have twigged from the start," he grunted from his cottage death bed where he lay surrounded by vomit bowls and pain-killing flasks of Glenfiddich. He had gut cancer. And he was not going quietly into that good night. He laceratingly abused his friends making the gloomy pilgrimage to his final resting place in Southend-on-Sea. "You're just another wide boy with a fast typewriter," he cursed me. But then, miraculously, Ray remitted. He returned to London for a last brilliant flourish. And, unannounced, barged into my Pimlico flat one night with Freda Balcon on his arm.

My fail-safe battle-stations buzzer should have been going like mad. But Freda's beauty paralyzed me. For an English country barrister's daughter, she looked more like a great Aztec queen, dark and imperious and (always the fault of the observer not the observed) mysterious. Ray chattered on maliciously while Freda took tea with unsmiling dignity and poise. My eyes locked on hers in fascination. Here, at last, was the Literary Lady of My Dreams. She to wipe out the bloody painful memory of Rose O'Malley. The few times Freda delicately raised her large brown eyes from the teacup I was sure I detected an unambiguous signal: rescue me from my husband, family, Ray, life.

I fell like a ton of bricks. To be scientific about it, I landed on all three of her. Follow me. First, there was stunning, elusively maternal Freda. But also her fictional character "Ann Charteris," the heroine of her divorce novel, *The Hungry Vessel.* But *then*, too, Julie Christie—who played 'Ann Charteris' in the movie of the book—an

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actress I already had a crush on over John Schlesinger's movie *Darling*. Freda-Ann-Julie was an irresistible team. It was like being romantically mugged by the finest snatch and grab gang in London.

Ray, glancing at both of us, saw that his mission was accomplished and departed.

Freda just sat there, with bowed head, as if awaiting an executioner's final blow.

(Of course it was a setup. Long after he died a friend of Ray's confided that Freda and Ray had cooked it up on a rainy Sunday afternoon out of boredom and because she was curious about her great literary rival, Rose.)

By instinct, Freda said and did nothing to blur the magic moment. She was painting a wordless portrait of herself, letting her own magnetic good looks, 'Ann's' defiant fragility and Julie's angular charm do all the work.

I held her surprisingly large, competent hand.

Soon—how?—it was almost midnight. Freda glanced at her wrist watch as if checking the time against a deadline. "Let's go to the house," she said a little automatically. In a state of over-excitement bordering on hysteria, I followed her downstairs to her Mini. I'd never done it with three women at once.

Freda was brilliantly silent on the drive from Pimlico to her turf, Parliament Hill Fields. Was she as choked with desire as me? I was intensely curious about her home. The Sunday color supplements had made it famous as the lair of the archetypically creative yet temperately middle class English family: author Freda (Princess Margaret's favorite sob-sister), husband the architect William laden with prizes and his own popular TV program on BBC-2, and their six Barriesque children, including RADA trainee Samantha, Eton rebel Simon, folk singer Vanessa, prodigy cartoonist Peregrine, ballet child star Sarah and (startling intrusion of late summer sex) infant Auberon. The Balcons were so often on television and in "the Sundays" that I felt I knew them almost as well as the crowd in the Rovers Return pub on "Coronation Street." In Lord Snowden's photographs they radiated aggressive grace.

This dark neurosis of mine for fairy tale English families had more than once caused me grief. In their drawing rooms and glass-enclosed conservatories I felt not like an aristocratic Lord Tarzan of Greystoke returning to his ancestral hearth, but a slimy Jewish golem waiting for their indifferent touch to turn me human. Such, such is the power of MGM's "A Yank At Oxford" and "Mrs. Miniver."

Freda's Mini stopped in front of the huge multi-roomed house at the top of a small terraced hill facing Hampstead Heath. She turned off the ignition and let me kiss her. Without speaking she waited in the darkness. Then headlamps veered off the main road and up into the driveway. As if by signal, Freda got out and took me firmly by the hand. Under a canopy of heavily branched trees, we walked up the stone steps. It was cold. I hoped we could have a cup of hot tea first.

We bumped into William at the front door. (Actually, I knew him slightly from co-appearances on TV; I liked his gracious habit of calling me "Rob" as if we were old Boodles members.) William was with a lissom, leather-jacketed London Thing, as Freda called her later.

William, bless his urbane little heart, was unsurprised. But Freda, my dark and eternal enigma, suddenly went all ogle-eyed and sprightly. Gripping me hard by the elbow she practically steered me into her husband.

"Oh hello, William, isn't it beastly freezing out, we must see to the Mini, it's coughing like an old asthmatic, I've got your things in the back, is Sammy in or staying with the Redgraves, Nanny *still* hasn't got Auberon's formula right. Hello, darling." William, balding and portly, a cherubic seducer, blinked through his thick-lensed spectacles at his wife then greeted me warmly even affectionately. "Nice to see you again, Rob. If you're not doing anything for Christmas Day get Freda to invite you over."

Courteously excusing himself, he opened the massive front door (painted a chic Sandersons mauve-purple, all the rage that year, I was sure if only I could see it by daylight), and practically ass-patted the Jean Shrimpton clone inside and shut the barrier in our faces.

Freda stared at the door.

From that moment on, I never got another clear look at her face. She turned away from the dim transom light and led me by the hand round the side to a glass-enclosed extension, her writing studio. She was totally silent. Angry? Grieving? Overcome by lust? (I hoped.) Inside and upstairs, the large, split-level studio had a railed balcony to which Freda took me by the light from the main house's side windows. There was a bed, or rather a camp cot, in the corner. She lay down on it and, wordlessly, pulled me down on top of her. I kept trying to see her face. The act, once I got her tweeds off, was dry, remorseless, mute.

Well, I thought, that was only a first go. She's only used to fat William.

Later, still in the dark, she boiled us both cups of Darjeeling on a small Belling ring stove. I sat on her cot, feeling the rough blanket under my naked behind, and shivered. From back under the blanket she solemnly clinked cups with me.

"What's she like then?" Freda broke the dark silence.

My first dirty thought was: If it will buy her for me I'll tell her anything.

What's William like? I fended her off.

"Oh William," Freda muttered bitterly, "he's as unchanging as the seasons. Sensitive, virile, anonymous. He has possessed me since the first day of our marriage—would you believe I was a virgin. I *love* being owned. Once he established his rights he lost interest—except in the children. Can't fault him there. What's Rose like, in a situation like this?"

Like what?

"Oh, you know, modern and heartless. Unforgiving."

What *was* Freda talking about?

She told me. On and on and on, about her and William, the exciting hopelessness of them together. She cried, drily, refusing any sympathy. "If you want to help me," she repeated fiercely in the night, "*tell* me about Rose."

You mean, I asked, how she screws?

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Freda lay quietly, angrily. I was totally confused. Ray, you sonofabitch.

"It's the children, you see," Freda wept discreetly. "I'm supposed to love them. Worse. Like them. It's my duty. I'm a good maternal soldier. I do try. William refuses to see what's going on. They all adore him. Why not? The children disgust me. They do. It's Christmas. I fall apart every Christmas. It's their greed, do you understand? Their *greed.*"

Freda said she had had to go into a sanitarium after each of the last three Christmases. Twice William had granted doctors permission to ECT-shock her out of her depression. "I wanted it. Freda needed to be punished. Because, if they hadn't put her away, she would surely have slaughtered the lot. Their faces when they receive the presents. That's what the doctors' electricity is supposed to rub out. How can anyone in their right mind be happy with a Christmas family?"

There there, I said.

"When I was a small child it was all so much better, don't you see. Father took us all to Christmas Eve service, we each had to put a farthing in the silver collection plate.

There was the choir. Sometimes, not often, snow. Christmas was part of our piety. I was a very devout little thing. Presents were small and lovely but not *the*—" She stopped. "But you're a Jew," she protested.

That's okay, I said. I've seen it done in the movies.

"Oh, now I've hurt thee. Have I hurt thee, Rose O'Malley's lad?"

In the cold darkness I kept trying to focus on which one of them was having the breakdown. Sounded more like 'Ann Charteris' than Julie Christie or Freda Balcon.

I put my hand on her. "Oh yes. Right there."

Afterwards, she said, softly, almost wonderingly, "But you're greedy too, aren't it?"

My Aztec queen had gone.

Do you want me to get William? I asked.

"It's not urgent," Freda said briskly, slipping out of the cot and wrapping herself in its scratchy blanket. I put back on my clothes.

In the dim light from the big house I could see her perched, like an Indian squaw, on a high wooden stool in front of a long table. Instinctively I knew there would be marked galleys on it somewhere.

She waited. Then, in the dark studio, I heard an amazing sound. A pen scratching on a pad. Oh terrif. "I spell Wasserman with a double-s," I said.

"Don't be unkind," came Freda's voice. "Or self-righteous."

Why do you hate Rose? I asked.

Quick as a flash the answer came: "She cannot have William on the cheap."

Rose and William Balcon. Well well.

I told Freda she was wasting her energy. Rose and I were a back number.

"Hmm. Yes. William said Rose said you'd no notion of what was real and unreal." Scratch scratch.

You and Bill talk about it all the time then? I felt like a Roosevelt Road pool room hustler out-hustled by the rack boy.

"We *always* talk. We always will. Not even the children seem to understand that."

Are you, uh, going to the sanitarium this Christmas too?

"This year I was really efficient. I had myself topped up *before.*"

William's a first class s.o.b. for signing you into the convulsions, I said.

"It's that—or chcchh!" she said, making a throat cutting sound.

I heard her yawn.

Can I kiss you? I asked.

No, she said. Kiss Rose O'Malley.

I wanted a last look. Guiding myself to the silhouette of an anglepoise, I felt for it and switched it on. The staring yellow light stabbed her face inches away. She blinked but otherwise did not flinch. Slowly, I lifted my hand until it became the base of her marvelous Mexican-eyed face. A piece of stone sculpture, it was. A magnificent carving. I wanted to remember it, almost eagerly devoid of expression. Freda took the opportunity of the light to examine me too. I smiled, gallantly. But she was too busy to return it.

"Goodbye," she said. "Please don't mind. It wasn't your fault."

As I felt my way down the stripped pine steps to the door, she said, with real feeling, "I hope St. Nicholas brings you everything wonderful, Prince O'Malley."

The Prince, outside, made his way down the short hill. He stood on the pavement gazing up at the large, still-lighted house with its nice large family cozily inside. He envied William's London Thing. Probably asleep in some alcove, warm and comfortable. How did you graduate from field hand to servants' quarters in these parts?

No matter what they say, I reminded myself as I walked to Gospel Oak to look for a taxi or an early morning train, I belong as much as they do. □

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At Play in the Paradise of Bombs

Twice a man's height and topped by strands of barbed wire, a chain-link fence stretched for miles along the highway leading up to the main gate of the Arsenal. Beside the gate were tanks, hulking dinosaurs of steel, one on each side, their long muzzles slanting down to catch trespassers in a cross-fire. A soldier emerged from the gatehouse, gun on hip, silvered sunglasses blanking his eyes. My father stopped our car. He leaned out the window and handed the guard some papers which my mother had been nervously clutching. "With that license plate, I had you pegged for visitors," said the guard. "But I see you've come to stay." His flat voice ricocheted against the rolled-up windows of the back seat where I huddled beside my sister. I hid my face in the upholstery, to erase the barbed wire and tanks and mirror-eyed soldier, and tried to wind myself into a ball as tight as the fist of fear in my stomach. By and by, our car eased forward into the Arsenal, the paradise of bombs.

This was in April of 1951, in Ohio. We had driven north from Tennessee, where spring had already burst the buds of trees and cracked the flowers open. Up here on the hem of Lake Erie the earth was bleak with snow. I had been told about northern winters, but in the red clay country south of Memphis I had seen only occasional flurries, harmless as confetti, never this smothering quilt of white. My mother had been crying since Kentucky. Sight of the Arsenal's fences and guard shacks looming out of the snow brought her misery to the boil. "It's like a concentration camp," she whispered to my father. I had no idea what she meant. I was not quite six, born two months after the gutting of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. My birth sign was the mushroom cloud. "It looks exactly like those pictures of the German camps," she lamented. Back in Tennessee, the strangers who had bought our farm were clipping bouquets from her garden. Those strangers had inherited everything—the barn and jittery cow, the billy goat fond of cornsilks, the crops of beans and potatoes already planted, the creek bottom cleared of locust trees, the drawling voices of neighbors, the smell of cotton dust.

My father had worked through the Second World War at a munitions plant near his home town in Mississippi. Now his company, hired by the Pentagon to run this Ohio Arsenal, was moving him north to supervise the production lines where artillery shells and land mines and bombs were loaded with explosives. Later I would hear stories about those loadlines. The concrete floors were so saturated with TNT that any chance spark would set off a quake. The workers used tools of brass to guard against sparks, but every now and again a careless chump would drop a pocket knife or shell casing, and lose a leg. Once a forklift dumped a pallet of barrels and blew out an entire factory wall, along with three munitions loaders.

In 1951 I was too young to realize that what had brought on all this bustle in our lives was the war in Korea; too green to notice which way the political winds were blowing. Asia was swallowing bombs and bullets voraciously. At successive news conferences, President Truman meditated aloud on whether or not to spill *the* Bomb—the sip of planetary hemlock—over China. Senator McCarthy was denouncing Reds from every available podium, pinning a single handy label on all the bugbears of the nation. Congress had recently passed bills designed to hamstring unions and slam the doors of America in the faces of immigrants. The Soviet Union had detonated its own atomic weapons, and the search was on for the culprits who had blabbed our secret. How else but through treachery could such a benighted nation ever build such a clever bomb? In the very month of our move to the Arsenal, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sentenced to death. J. Robert Oppenheimer, voicing second thoughts about the can of worms he had helped tip over, was on the ropes. In a madcap effort to preserve our lead in the race toward oblivion, our scientists were perfecting the hydrogen bomb.

We rolled to our new home in the Arsenal over the impossible snow, between parking lots filled with armored troop carriers, jeeps, strafing helicopters, wheeled howitzers, bulldozers, Sherman tanks, all the brawny machines of war. On the front porch of our Memphis home I had read GI Joe comic books, and so I knew the names and shapes of these death-dealing engines. In the gaudy cartoons the soldiers had seemed like two-legged chunks of pure glory, muttering speeches between bursts on their machine guns, clenching the pins of grenades between their dazzling teeth. Their weapons had seemed like tackle worthy of gods. But as we drove between those parking lots crowded with real tanks, past guard houses manned by actual soldiers, a needle of dread pierced my brain.

Thirty years later the needle is still there, and is festering. I realize now that in moving from a scrape-dirt farm in Tennessee to a munitions factory in Ohio I had leaped overnight from the nineteenth century into the heart of the twentieth. I had landed in a place that concentrates the truth about our condition more potently than any metropolis or suburb. If, one hundred years from now, there are still human beings capable of thinking about the past, and if they turn their sights on our own time, what they will see through the crosshairs of memory will be a place very like the Arsenal, a fenced wilderness devoted to the building and harboring of the instruments of death.

Our house was one of twenty white frame boxes arrayed in a circle about a swatch of lawn. Originally built for the high-ranking military brass, some of these government quarters now also held civilians: the doctors assigned to the base hospital, the engineers who carried slide-rules dangling from their belts, the accoun-

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Wilderness Plots *a new book by SCOTT R. SANDERS, has just been published by William Morrow & Co. . . . STEPHEN MINOT was an independent candidate for Congress in 1968.*

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tants and supervisors, the managerial honchos. In our children's argot, this hoop of houses became the Circle, the beginning and ending point of all our journeys. Like campers drawn up around a fire, like wagons wound into a fearful ring, the houses faced inward on the Circle, as if to reassure the occupants, for immediately outside that tamed hoop the forest began, a tangled, beast-haunted woods stretching for miles in every direction.

Through our front door I looked out on mowed grass, flower boxes, parked cars, the curves of concrete, the wink of windows. From the back door I saw only trees, bare dark bones thrust up from the snow in that first April, snarled green shadows in all the following summers. Not many nights after we had settled in, I glimpsed a white-tailed deer lurking along the edge of that woods out back, the first of thousands I would see over the years. The Arsenal was a sanctuary for deer, I soon learned, and also for beaver, fox, turkey, geese, every manner of beast smaller than wolves and bears. Protected by that chain link fence, which kept out hunters and wood-cutters as well as spies, the animals had multiplied to something very near their ancient numbers, and the trees grew thick and old until they died with their roots on. So throughout my childhood I had a choice of where to play, inside the charmed Circle, or outside in the wild thickets.

Viewed on a map against Ohio's bulldozed land, the Arsenal was only a tiny patch of green, about thirty square miles; some of it had been pasture as recently as ten years earlier, when the government bought the land; it was broken up by airstrips and bunkers and munitions depots; guards cruised its perimeter and bored through its heart twenty-four hours a day; but to my young eyes it seemed like an unbounded wilderness. The biggest parcel of land for the Arsenal had belonged to a U.S. Senator, who—in the selfless tradition of public servants—grew stinking rich from the sale. The rest was purchased from farmers, some of them descendants of the hardbitten New England folks who had settled that corner of Ohio, most of them reluctant to move. One of the old-timers refused to budge from his house until the wrecking crew arrived, and then he slung himself from a noose tied to a rafter in his barn. By the time I came along to investigate, all that remained of his place was the crumbling silo; but I found it easy to imagine him strung up there, roped to his roof-beam, riding his ship as it went down. Every other year or so, the older children would string a scarecrow from a rafter in one of the few surviving barns, and then lead the younger children in for a grisly look. I only fell for the trick once, but the image of that dangling husk is burned into my mind.

Rambling through the Arsenal's 21,000 acres, at first in the safe back seats of our parents' cars, then on bicycles over the gravel roads, and later on foot through the backcountry, we children searched out the ruins of those abandoned farms. Usually the buildings had been torn down and carted away, and all that remained were the cellar holes half-filled with rubble, the skewed limestone foundations, the stubborn flowers. What used to be lawns were grown up in sumac, maple, blackberry. The rare concrete walks and driveways were shattered, sown to ferns. Moss grew in the chiseled names of the dead on headstones in backyard cemeteries. We could spy a house site in the spring by the blaze of jonquils, the blue fountain of lilacs, the forsythia and starry columbine; in the summer by roses; in the fall by the glow of mums and zinnias. Asparagus and rhubarb kept pushing up through the meadows. The blasted orchards kept squeezing out plums and knotty apples and beethick pears. From the cellar holes wild grape vines twisted up to ensnarl the shade trees. In the ruins we discovered marbles, bottles, the bone handles of knives, the rusty heads of hammers and the tips of plows. And we dug up keys by the fistful, keys of brass and black iron, skeleton keys to ghostly doors. We gathered the fruits of other people's planting, staggering home with armfuls of flowers, sprays of pussywillow and bittersweet, baskets of berries, our faces sticky with juice.

Even where the army's poisons had been dumped, nature did not give up. In a remote corner of the Arsenal, on land which had been used as a Boy Scout camp before the war, the ground was so filthy with the discarded makings of bombs that not even guards would go there. But we children went, lured on by the scarlet warning signs. DANGER. RESTRICTED AREA. The skull-and-crossbones aroused in us dreams of pirates. We found the log huts overgrown with vines, the swimming lake a bog of algae and cattails, the stone walls scattered by the heave of frost. The only scrap of metal we discovered was a bell, its clapper rusted solid to the rim. In my bone marrow I carry traces of the poison from that graveyard of bombs, as we all carry a smidgen of radioactivity from every atomic blast; perhaps at this very moment one of those alien molecules, like a grain of sand in an oyster, is irritating some cell in my body, or in your body, to fashion a pearl of cancer.

Poking about in the ruins of camp and farms, I felt a wrestle of emotions, half sick with loss, half exultant over the return of forest. It was terrifying and at the same time comforting to see how quickly the green wave lapped over the human remains, scouring away the bold marks of occupation. The displaced farmers, gone only a decade, had left scarcely more trace than the ancient Indians who had heaped up burial mounds in this territory. We hunted for Indian treasure, too, digging in every suspicious hillock until our arms ached. We turned up shards of pottery, iridescent shells, fiery bits of flint; but never any bones. The best arrow points and ax-heads we invariably discovered, not by looking, but by chance, when jumping over a creek or scratching in the dirt with a bare incurious toe. This was my first lesson in the Zen of seeing, seeing by not-looking.

With or without looking, we constantly stumbled across the more common variety of mound in the Arsenal, the hump-backed bunkers where munitions were stored. Implausibly enough, they were called igloos. There were rows and rows of them, strung out along rail beds like lethal beads. Over the concrete vaults grass had been planted, so that from the air, glimpsed by enemy bombers, they would look like undulating hills. Sheep kept them mowed. The signs surrounding the igloos were larger and more strident than those warning us to keep away from the waste dumps. These we respected, for we feared that even a heavy footfall on the grassy roof of a bunker might set it off. Three or four had blown up over the years, from clumsy handling or the quirk of chemicals. Once a jet trainer crashed into a field of them

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and skidded far enough to trigger a pair. These numbers multiplied in our minds, until we imagined the igloos popping like corn. No, no, they were set far enough apart to avoid a chain reaction if one should explode, my father assured me. But in my reckoning the munitions bunkers were vaults of annihilation. I stubbornly believed that one day they all would blow, touched off by lightning, maybe, or by an enemy agent. Whenever I stole past those fields of bunkers or whenever they drifted like a flotilla of green hump-backed whales through my dreams, I imagined fire leaping from one to another, the spark flying outward to consume the whole creation. This poison I also carry in my bones, this conviction that we build our lives in mine fields. Long before I learned what new sort of bombs had devoured Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I knew from creeping among those igloos full of old-fashioned explosives that, on any given day, someone else's reckless step might consume us all.

Of course we played constantly at war. How could we avoid it? At the five-and-dime we bought plastic soldiers, their fists molded permanently around machine guns and grenades, their faces frozen into expressions of bravery or bloodlust. They were all men, all except the weaponless nurse who stood with uplifted lantern to inspect the wounded; and those of us who toyed at this mayhem were all boys. In the unused garden plot out back of the Circle, we excavated trenches and foxholes, embedded cannons inside rings of pebbles, heaped dirt into mounds to simulate ammo bunkers. Our miniature tanks left treadmarks in the dust exactly like those cut into the blacktop roads by real tanks. Running miniature trucks, our throats caught the exact groan of the diesel convoys that hauled army reservists past our door every summer weekend. When we grew tired of our Lilliputian battles, we took up weapons in our own hands. Any stick would do for a gun, any rock for a bomb. At the drugstore we bought war comics and on wet afternoons we studied war movies on television to instruct us in the plots for our games. No one ever chose to play the roles of Japs or Nazis or Commies, and so the hateful labels were hung on the smallest or shabbiest kids. For the better part of my first three years in the Arsenal I was a villain, consigned to the Yellow Peril or the Red Plague. Like many of the runts, even wearing the guise of a bad guy I refused to go down, protesting every lethal shot from the good guys. If all the kids eligible to serve as enemies quit the game, the Americans just blasted away at invisible foes, GI's against the universe.

Whenever we cared to we could glance up from our play in the garden battlefield and see the dish of a radar antenna spinning silently beyond the next ridge. We knew it scoured the sky for enemy bombers and, later, missiles. The air was filled with electronic threats. Every mile or so along the roads there were spiky transmitters, like six-foot-tall models of the Empire State Building, to magnify and boom along radio messages between security headquarters and the cruising guards. Imagining dire secrets whispered in code, I keened my ears to catch these broadcasts, as if by one particular resonance of brain cells I might snare the voices inside my skull. What I eventually heard,

over a shortwave radio owned by one of the older boys, were guards jawing about lunch, muttering about the weather, about wives or bills or bowling, swearing aimlessly, or counting deer.

This was our favorite family outing on the long summer evenings, after supper, after the washing of dishes, to drive the gravel roads of the Arsenal and count deer. We would surprise them in clearings, a pair or a dozen, grass drooping from their narrow muzzles, jaws working. They would lift their delicate heads and gaze at us with slick dark eyes, some of the bucks hefting intricate antlers, the fresh does thick-uddered, the fawns still dappled. If the herd was large enough to make counting tricky, my father would stop the car. And if we kept very still, the deer, after studying us awhile, would go back to their grazing. But any slight twitch, a throat cleared or the squeak of a window crank, would startle them. First one white tail would jerk up, then another and another, the tawny bodies wheeling, legs flashing, and the deer would vanish like smoke. Some nights we counted over three hundred.

There were so many deer that in bad winters the managers of the Arsenal ordered the dumping of hay on the snow to keep the herds from starving. When my father had charge of this chore, I rode atop the truckload of bales, watching the tire-slices trail away behind us in the frozen crust. Still the weak went hungry. Sledding, we would find their withered carcasses beside the gnawed stems of elderberry bushes. A few generations earlier, wolves and mountain lions would have helped out the snow, culling the slow-of-foot. But since the only predators left were two-legged ones, men took on the task of thinning the herds, and naturally they culled out the strongest, the heavy-antlered bucks, the meaty does. Early each winter the game officials would guess how many deer ought to be killed, and would sell that many hunting tags. Most of the licenses went to men who worked on the Arsenal, the carpenters and munitions loaders and firemen. But a quantity would always be reserved for visiting military brass.

They rolled into the Arsenal in chauffeured sedans or swooped down in star-spangled planes, these generals and colonels. Their hunting clothes smelled of moth balls. Their shotguns glistened with oil. Jeeps driven by orderlies delivered them to the brushwood blinds, where they slouched on canvas chairs and slugged whiskey to keep warm, waiting for the deer to run by. The deer always ran obligingly by, since men and boys hired from nearby towns would have been out since dawn beating the bushes, scaring up a herd and driving it down the ravine past the hidden generals, who pumped lead into the torrent of flesh.

Each deer season of my childhood I heard about this hunt. It swelled in my imagination to the scale of myth, outstripped in glory the remote battles of the last war, seemed more grand even than the bloody feuds between frontiersmen and Indians. I itched to go along, cradling my own shotgun, but my father said no, not until the winter after my thirteenth birthday. If I can't carry a gun, I

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begged, let me watch the hunt with empty hands. And so, the year I turned eleven he let me join the beaters, who would be herding deer for a party of shooters from the Pentagon.

A freezing rain the night before had turned the world to glass. As we fanned out over the brittle snow, our bootsteps sounded like the shattering of windows. We soon found our deer, lurking where they had to be, in the frozen field where hay had been dumped. Casting about them our net of bodies, we left open only the path that led to the ravine where the officers waited. With a clap of hands we set them scurrying, the white tails like an avalanche, black hoofs punching the snow, lank hams kicking skyward. Not long after, we heard the crackle of shotguns. When the shooting was safely over, I hurried up to inspect the kills. The deer lay with legs crumpled beneath their bellies or jutting stiffly out, heads askew, tongues dangling like handles of leather. The wounded ones had stumbled away, trailing behind them ropes of blood; my father and the other seasoned hunters had run after to finish them off. The generals were tramping about in the red snow, noisily claiming their trophies, pinning tags on the ear of each downed beast. The local men gutted the deer. They heaped the steaming entrails on the snow and tied ropes through the tendons of each hind leg and dragged them to the waiting jeeps. I watched it all to the end that once, rubbed my face in it, and never again asked to work as a beater, or to watch the grown men shoot, or to hunt.

With the money I was paid for herding deer, I bought the fixings for rocket fuel. That was the next stage in our playing at war, the launching of miniature missiles. We started by wrapping tinfoil around the heads of kitchen matches, graduated to aluminum pipes crammed with gunpowder, and then to machined tubes that burned zinc or magnesium. On the walls of our bedrooms we tacked photos of real rockets, the V-2 and Viking; the homely Snark, Hound Dog, Bullpup, Honest John, Little John, Mighty Mouse, Davy Crockett; and the beauties with godly names—Atlas, Titan, Jupiter, Juno, Nike-Hercules—the pantheon of power. By then I knew what rode in the nose cones, I knew what sort of bombs had exploded in Japan two months before my birth, I even knew, from reading physics books, how we had snared those fierce bits of sun. But I grasped these awesome facts in the same numb way I grasped the definition of infinity. I carried the knowledge in me like an ungerminated seed.

There was a rumor among the children that atomic bombs were stored in the Arsenal. The adults denied it, as they denied our belief that ghosts of Indians haunted the burial mounds or that shades of strung-up farmers paced in the haylofts of barns, as they dismissed all our bogies. We went searching anyway. Wasting no time among the igloos, which were too obvious, too vulnerable, we searched instead in the boondocks for secret vaults that we felt certain would be surrounded by deadly electronics and be perfect in their camouflage. Traipsing along railway spurs, following every set of wheeltracks, we eventually came to a fenced compound that satisfied all our suspicions. Through the gridwork of wire and above the earthen ramparts we could see the gray concrete skulls of bunkers. We felt certain that the eggs of annihilation had been laid in those vaults, but none of us dared climb the fence to investigate. It was as if, having sought out the lair of a god, we could not bring ourselves to approach the throne.

In our searches for the Bomb we happened across a good many other spots we were not supposed to see—dumps and manmade deserts, ponds once used for hatching fish and now smothered in oil, machine guns rusting in weeds, clicking signal boxes. But the most alluring discovery of all was the graveyard of bombers. This was a field crammed with the ratty hulks of World War II Flying Fortresses, their crumpled green skins painted with enigmatic numbers and symbols, their wings twisted, propellers shattered, cockpits open to the rain. In one of them we found a pair of mannequins rigged up in flight gear, complete with helmets, wires running from every joint in their artificial bodies. What tests they had been used for in these crashed planes we had no way of guessing; we borrowed their gear and propped them in back to serve as navigators and bombardiers. Most of the instruments had been salvaged, but enough remained for us to climb into the cockpits and fly imaginary bombing runs. Sitting where actual pilots had sat, clutching the butterfly wings of a steering wheel, gazing out through a cracked windshield, we rained fire and fury on the cities of the world. Not even the sight of the deer's guts steaming on the red snow had yet given me an inkling of how real streets would look beneath our storm of bombs. I was drunk on the fancied splendor of riding those metal leviathans, making them dance by a touch of my fingers. At the age when Samuel Clemens sat on the bank of the Mississippi smitten by the power of steamboats, I watched rockets sputter on their firing stand, I sat in the gutted cockpits of old bombers, hungry to pilot sky ships.

The sky over the Arsenal was sliced by plenty of routine ships, the screaming fighters, droning trainers, groaning transports, percussive helicopters; but what caught the attention of the children were the rare, rumored visitations of flying saucers. To judge by reports in the newspaper and on television, UFOs were sniffing about here and there all over the earth. We studied the night sky hopefully, fearfully, but every promising light we spied turned into a commonplace aircraft. I was beginning to think the aliens had declared the Arsenal off-limits. But then a neighbor woman, who sometimes looked after my sister and me in the afternoons, told us she had ridden more than once in a flying saucer that used to come fetch her in the wee hours from the parking lot behind the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. Mrs. K. was about fifty when we knew her, a stunted woman who gave the impression of being too large for her body, as if at birth she had been wrapped in invisible cords which were beginning to give way; she had a pinched face and watery eyes, a mousey bookkeeper for a husband, and no children. She was fastidious about her house, where the oak floors gleamed with wax, bathrooms glittered like jeweled chambers, and fragile knickknacks balanced on shelves of glass. When my mother dropped us by her place for an afternoon's stay, we crept about in terror of sullying or breaking something. In all her house there was nothing for children to play with except, stashed away in the bottom drawer of her desk, a dogeared pack of cards, a pair of dice, and a miniature roulette wheel. Soon tiring of these gizmos, my sister and I sat on the waxed floor and wheedled her into talking. At first she would

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maunder on about the life she had led on military bases around the world, the bridge parties and sewing circles; but eventually her eyes would begin to water and her teeth to chatter and she would launch into the history of her abduction by the aliens.

"They're not at all like devils," she insisted, "but more like angels, with translucent skin that glows almost as if there were lights inside their bodies." And their ship bore no resemblance to saucers, she claimed. It was more like a diamond as large as a house, all the colors of the rainbow streaming through the facets. The angelic creatures stopped her in the parking lot during one of her stargazing walks, spoke gentle English inside her head, took her on board their craft and put her to sleep. When she awoke she was lying naked, surrounded by a ring of princely aliens, and the landscape visible through the diamond walls of the ship was the vague purple of wisteria blossoms. "They weren't the least bit crude or nasty," she said, the words coming so fast they were jamming together in her throat, "no, no, they examined me like the most polite of doctors, because all they wanted was to save us from destroying ourselves, you see, and in order to do that, first they had to understand our anatomy, and that's why they had chosen me, don't you see, they had singled me out to teach them about our species," she insisted, touching her throat, "and to give me the secret of our salvation, me of all people, you see, *me*."

My sister had the good sense to keep mum about our babysitter's stories, but I was so razzled by hopes of meeting with these aliens and learning their world-saving secrets that I blabbed about the possibility to my mother, who quickly wormed the entire chronicle from me. We never visited Mrs. K. again, but often we would see her vacuuming the lawn in front of her house. "Utterly crazy," my mother declared.

Mrs. K. was not alone in her lunacy. Every year or so one of the career soldiers, having stared too long into the muzzle of his own gun, would go berserk or break down weeping. A guard began shooting deer from his jeep and leaving the carcasses in heaps on the roads. A janitor poured muriatic acid into the swimming pool and then down his own throat. One Christmas time, the lieutenant colonel who played Santa Claus started raving at the annual gift-giving and terrified the expectant children out of their wits. It took five fathers to muscle him down and make him quit heaving presents from his bag of gewgaws. To this day I cannot see Santa's white beard and red suit without flinching. Life on military reservations had also crazed many of the army wives, who turned to drink and drugs. Now and again an ambulance would purr into the Circle and cart one of them away for therapy. When at home, they usually kept hidden, stewing in bedrooms, their children grown and gone or off to school or buried in toys. Outside, with faces cracked like the leather of old purses, loaded up with consoling chemicals, the crazed women teetered carefully down the sidewalk, as if down a tightrope over an abyss.

The Arsenal fed on war and the rumors of war. When the Pentagon's budget was fat, the Arsenal's economy prospered. We could tell how good or bad the times were by reading our fathers' faces, or by counting the pickup trucks in the parking lots. The folks who lived just outside the chain-link fence in trailers and tarpaper shacks did poorly in the slow spells, but did just fine whenever an outbreak of Red Scare swept through Congress. In the lulls between wars, the men used to scan the headlines looking for omens of strife, the way farmers would scan the horizon for promises of rain. In 1957, when the Arsenal was in the doldrums and parents were bickering across the dinner table, one October afternoon between innings of a softball game somebody read aloud the news about the launching of Sputnik. The mothers clucked their tongues and the fathers groaned; but soon the wise heads among them gloated, for they knew this Russian feat would set the loadlines humming, and it did.

Our model rocketeering took on a new cast. It occurred to us that any

RICHARD JACKSON

WHY WE SEE WHAT WE SEE

for Gary Margolis

In another room my daughter is holding
a steel globe, and thinks the world
isn't so big. Maybe she's right.
Do you remember how, when we sat
one evening reading to each other,
the clouds gathered, darkened, and we joked
to imagine the power our words might hold?
Whatever we said, the wind said
again, south of there, where horizons
were visible and important. South of there is
here, where you asked about the bird
that sang: "don't you see?" "don't you see?"
We didn't, but my daughter says she can
see the other side of the world.
In the sound of that bird, we should've seen
another time or place. You asked its name—
the Rufous-Sided Towhee, who nests
and scratches on the ground or low bushes,
and doesn't see much more than we do.
My daughter says we live in a place
larger than the world, if we could only see it.
I don't know, finally, what isn't invisible.
There's no time anywhere we can touch
which is exactly what the wind had to say.

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launcher capable of parking a satellite in orbit could plant an H-bomb in the Circle. If one of those bitter pills ever landed, we realized from our reading, there would be no Circle, no dallying deer, no forests, no Arsenal. Suddenly there were explosives above our heads as well as beneath our feet. The cracks in the faces of the crazed ladies deepened. Guards no longer joked with us as we passed through the gates to school. We children forgot how to sleep. For hours after darkness we squirmed on our beds, staring skyward. "Why don't you eat?" our mothers scolded. Aged 13 or 14, I stood one day gripping the edge of the mable-topped table in our living room, staring through a glass bell at the spinning golden balls of an anniversary clock, and cried, "I don't ever want to be a soldier, not ever, ever!"

Each weekend in summer the soldiers still played war. They liked to scare up herds of deer with their tanks and pin them against a corner of the fence. Snooping along afterward, we discovered tufts of hair and clots of flesh caught in the barbed wire from the bucks that had leapt over. Once, after a weekend soldier's cigarette had set off a brushfire, we found the charred bodies of a dozen deer jammed against a fence. We filled ourselves with that sight, and knew what it meant. There we lay, every child in the Arsenal, every adult, every soul within reach of the bombs —twisted black lumps trapped against a fence of steel. I have dreamed of those charred deer ever since. During the war in Vietnam, every time I read or heard about napalm, my head filled with visions of those blackened lumps.

To a child, it seemed the only salvation was in running away. Parents and the family roof were no protection from this terror. My notebooks filled with designs for orbiting worlds that we could build from scratch and for rocket ships that would carry us to fresh, unpoisoned planets. But I soon realized that no more than a handful of us could escape to the stars; and there was too much on earth—the blue fountains of lilacs, the red streak of a fox across snow, the faces of friends—that I could never abandon. I took longer and longer walks through the backwoods of the Arsenal, soaking in the green juices; but as I grew older, the forest seemed to shrink, the fences drew in, the munitions bunkers and the desolate chemical dumps seemed to spread like a rash, until I could not walk far in any direction without stumbling into a reminder of our preparations for doom.

Because the foundations of old farms were vanishing beneath the tangle of briars and saplings, for most of my childhood I had allowed myself to believe that nature would undo whatever mess we made. But the scars from these new chemicals resisted the return of life. The discolored dirt remained bare for years and years. Tank trucks spraying herbicides to save the cost of mowing stripped the roads and meadows of wildflowers. Fish floated belly-up in the scum of ponds. The shells of bird eggs, laced with molecules of our invention, were too flimsy to hold new chicks. The threads of the world were beginning to unravel.

In a single winter a hired trapper cleared out the beavers, which had been snarling the waterways, and the foxes, which had troubled the family dogs. Our own collie, brought as a puppy from Memphis, began to chase deer with a pack of dogs. At night he would slink back home with bloody snout and the smell of venison on his laboring breath. The guards warned us to keep him in; but he broke every rope. Once I saw the pack of them, wolves again, running deer across a field. Our collie was in the lead, gaining on a doe, and as I watched he bounded up and seized her by the ear and dragged her down, and the other dogs clamped on at the belly and throat. I preferred this wild killing to the shooting-gallery slaughter of the hunting season. If our own dogs could revert to wildness, perhaps there was still hope for the earth. But one day the guards shot the whole wolfish pack. Nature, in the largest sense of natural laws, would outlast us; but no particular scrap of it, no dog or pond or two-legged beast was guaranteed to survive.

There was comfort in the tales forever circulating among the children of marvelous deer glimpsed at dusk or dawn, bucks with white legs, a doe with pale fur in the shape of a saddle on her back, and, one year, a pair of ghostly albinos. Several of the children had seen the all-white deer. In 1962 I spent most of the summer sunsets looking for them, needing to find them, hungering for these tokens of nature's prodigal energies. By September I had still seen neither hide nor hair of them. That October was the showdown over the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba; Kennedy and Krushchev squared off at the opposite ends of a nuclear street, hands hovering near the butts of their guns. For two weeks, while these desperadoes brooded on whether to start the final shooting, I quit going to school and passed all the hours of daylight outdoors, looking for those albino deer. Once, on the edge of a thicket, on the edge of darkness, I thought I glimpsed them, milky spirits, wisps of fog. But I could not be sure. Eventually the leaders of the superpowers lifted their hands a few inches away from their guns; the missiles did not fly. I returned to my studies, but gazed stupidly at every page through a meshwork of fear. In December the existence of the albino deer was proven beyond a doubt, for one afternoon in hunting season an army doctor and his wife drove into the Circle with the pair of ghostly bodies tied onto the hood of their car.

The following year—the year when John Kennedy was killed and I registered for the draft and the tide of U.S. soldiers began to lap against the shores of Asia—my family moved from the Arsenal. "You'll sleep better now," my mother assured me. "You'll fatten up in no time." During the twelve years of our stay inside the chain-link fences, almost every night at suppertime outdated bombs would be detonated at the ammo dump. The concussion rattled the milkglass and willowware in the corner cupboard, rattled the forks against our plates, the cups against our teeth. It was like the muttering of local gods, a reminder of who ruled our neighborhood. From the moment I understood what those explosions meant, what small sparks they were of the engulfing fire, I lost my appetite for supper. But even outside the Arsenal, a mile or an ocean away, every night at suppertime my fork still stuttered against the plate, my teeth still chattered from the remembered explosions. They still do. Everywhere now there are bunkers beneath the humped green hills, electronic challenges and threats needle through the air we breathe, the last wild beasts fling themselves against our steel boundaries. The fences of the Arsenal have stretched outward until they circle the entire planet. I can never move outside; nor can you. —*Scott Russell Sanders*

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On Shooting a Super-intendent

The first principal I ever knew was a general; he was always in the halls. You didn't have to look for him. He was always around, scooping up little ones, two at a time, one in each arm. We used to pee in our pants for excitement, hoping and not hoping he would pick us up. He had panache. The second principal I ever knew, I never saw except once when I graduated from sixth grade, and they wheeled him out on a stroller. He was a closet principal. He was never in the halls. There were four stories in our school, and I inhabited all of them during my third to sixth grade sojourn at P.S. 177, and I never saw him except that once. Discipline problems were handled in the classroom by strapping young Irish cops, bonny girls they were. My fourth grade teacher, for example, one day took on Fred Calamari, who was two heads taller than she was and 50 pounds her senior. She threw him over her head. We never heard from Fred again. Miss O'Brien didn't need the principal . . . for anything. One day I heard her speak French to a little girl whose family was seeking asylum in the U.S. She blushed, she fumbled, Miss O'Brien did. She became utterly feminine. French will do that to the Irish. But our principal couldn't speak French. He could barely deliver the graduation speech in English. His name was Dr. something. The third principal was my first principal all over again; only this time I was a teen-ager. He didn't pick up teen-agers, but damn it, he was in the halls again, making everybody feel secure, the teachers too. My seventh grade English teacher was a nervous wreck . . . not from discipline, but from spinsterhood. Spinsterhood used to be a problem, but thank God, it's over. I recall my first and third principal flirting with this little nervous lady, joshing her, making her blush. He was as good as French. As I say, he had panache. My fourth principal was stuck in another closet. His name was also Dr. something, and oh, I saw him only at graduation. He arrived by ambulance. We had no discipline problems in the high school I attended . . . except among the faculty. But *we* would never "rat" on *them*. They were charming and young and exceedingly competent, and when they fell in love with one of their seniors, it was only natural. It was equal treatment before God. Then I went to college. No more principals.

My first principal when I became a teacher was always in the halls or in the yard. When kids required discipline, I went to him. He never said to me—

"Good teachers never have discipline problems,"

or "God never made a bad boy."

He just administered a beating.

But he didn't require me to be a prude.

"You'll hear rough language from these kids, and they will make obscene gestures. Can you take it? I don't beat a kid up for anything. He has to explode something. Can you take it?"

I told him I could even dish it out. But I couldn't beat up on the kids. I was a 90-pound weakling. He laughed. He thought I was Irish, although I could speak French.

The second principal I had as a teacher was in the closet because that is where the Dean of Girls kept him. She ran the school. Madame Robespierre. Except she knew no French, only the Reign of Terror. She was utterly lacking panache.

My third principal had everything. He spoiled me for life. He was in the halls, on the street, in the courtyard, in the bathrooms. He opened the school. He closed it. The custodial staff called him Horse Shit, out of respect, for he was everywhere. The San Francisco Unified School District had by this time acquired discipline problems in those high schools that were servicing 1800 to 2800 kids at a time. Changing demography and changing civil rights and changing wars were other problems contributing to discipline problems. But if we asked a kid not to kick his locker loud or to quit cursing in the halls because the noise was making it impossible for us to teach, we didn't receive a lecture from our principal on recognizing that discipline problems are never caused by kids, only by teachers. No! Just as a kid was telling us to go shove it, he would appear from out of nowhere, a jack-o'-lantern smile lighting up his countenance, and he would announce jovially to the kid who was sassing us—

"We don't talk to our teachers that way, do we?"

And the kid would say, "No, sir." No matter what his color was. I have never seen that pumpkin smile fail. He was a general, my third principal. He made the kids run for cover.

And I am a fascist. All this talk of generals. No, it's just that the age of the principal has passed. They are now largely a superfluous species, although like the dinosaur some of them are impressive. I really believe that our schools require government by consent, not government by principals or supervisors, and to that end I do not think we need principals anymore except as figureheads and then only by consent of the staff first and the kids and community second. What we really need are small schools where the staff decides things like budgets, attendance policies, dress codes, rally schedules . . . all of these based on population needs but also on a philosophy of education. Kids and communities know, for example, what their needs are; faculties should know the other. You see, the only cry for computers in the classroom comes from Hewlett-Packard and parents. Kids often want to learn Latin and not by computer. And Shakespeare. They're fascinated by Shakespeare; they think he's a foreign language. Parents want basic skills and speed reading. Kids want to know whether God is Shakespeare or the father of E.T. But talking about curriculum and attendance and God requires tact and time and smallness. Once a school takes on more than 1000 kids, it needs, or certainly thinks it needs, a general. But the only good general is the man who knows the name of

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W.S. DI PIERO

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Unhurt but still cheerless, alert
on our green terrace to promise or grievance,
waiting for a sign from the sky,
a bestowal, or intelligence vouchsafed
—that we could love
without loss, or that love could save
time spent loving—
we watched the swallows' tumbling flight,
the leafy dust of twilight trembling
behind the chopped medieval towers.

From what we wanted then
I should have known that years later,
now long apart, the unpained unhappiness
would come back, again on high,
in the streaked light flaring from sunburst distances
toward an unseen center.
No towers visible, and no birds,
only this black lake, the mountains
folding westward, the air already sifted,
the beautiful renewed dispersal that's tomorrow.

every single kid in his army, or if he doesn't know all the names, he knows the kids by smell; Napoleons are not born every day except in pastry shops. Small schools, live faculties, that's what we need. And if a faculty wants to retain a present principal, let it be at a salary commensurate with teachers' salaries. A doctorate from a School of Education plus an administrative credential is surely the equivalent of a Master's Degree in English, math, language, science, music—graduate schools being equal. But we all know that many of our principals arrived at their posts from jockdom, and they can scarcely spell, let alone think, and even those who can, write such abominable dissertations—the poor school secretaries who are obliged to type the drivel squirm and barf to edit the stuff. No principal is worth more than a classroom teacher. It is a myth that says otherwise.

Let me review in one short breath where the myth comes from. Outside the country school house, it was unthinkable that a woman should graduate from classroom teaching into anything more exalted than the Dean of Girls. For a very good reason. Women couldn't beat up on boys. Or girls. They were supposed to say dumb things like,

"Oh, my dear, we never take the name of the Lord in vain," when a trouble-making girl would shriek:

"You stupid (or that stupid) God-damned son of a bitch."

And women didn't know how to do other things required of principals, like supervise halls, stay after school, question strangers, ask them to leave. And women didn't know how to do statistics when normal curves were all the rage. Now women can do math and nobody is in the halls. All are running for cover and protecting themselves as best they can.

We need small schools and determined staffs who can listen to and be listened to. Small is best now. I know there is no money for small. We're stuck with principals and shall be for some time. But I do want to plant the seeds of discontent. I don't care that Mortimer Adler is on my side or that *"plus ça change."* As a general principle I say that we have no more principals, even if they are generals. Even if they speak French.

On Super Intendents.

We need them. They have to carry out policy set by School Boards or State Departments of Education. But once a year they should be shot. They are necessary people but they are evil because evil is an option they choose. They choose to be men of little conscience. They will tell you they can't afford conscience. What they are really lacking is morals. Half of them are sociopaths.

You don't believe me. Well, you have to see the language they use when they dismiss staff. They send out "Letters of Accusation." They accuse people that are about to be fired. "In the matter of non re-employment," the letter of accusation begins, ". . . I, _____, allege;" and the allegation follows. How can one allege that one is the associate superintendent of schools? I guess it's possible if you're a sociopath. Allege means to state or declare something under oath without offering complete proof. See? It means that the "I" doesn't really have a person behind it, just a title which may or may not be around tomorrow, not the title but the person who doesn't know who "it" is. Who *what* is? That's what I mean. The jargon continues that the respondent "was at all times mentioned herein and now is a certificated employee of the District."

That's why superintendents should be shot.

They permit this mush. I suspect they think this mush. But they also push people around because people are mostly teachers or other underlings who will lap up lead poisoning for a buck or a nod.

The point is, superintendents are not real. They're never in the halls, anybody's halls. They are eternally in conference or at lunch or in taxis. They come from graduate schools having earned a PhD, and then they move from one school district to another, spreading mischief and mayhem wherever they go.

But we need them. They are good punching bags during a strike because they honestly feel nothing. No matter how much you hate the principal, you never enjoy making him cry, especially when he's a general. But if you can make one superintendent cry, you've got it made. As a breed they are forever attending, pretending, contending, offending and always intending. They are super intendents. They gave up doing anything supervisory, advisory, or just plain wise a long time ago. They certainly can't speak French.

—Flossie Lewis

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The Imagination of Catastrophe

Weary of roamin' on,
Yearning to see the dawn,
Counting the hours till I can lay down my load.
Weary, but I don't mind,
Knowing that soon I'll find
That peace and contentment at the end of the road.

In 1929, Irving Berlin, that quintessentially American songsmith, wrote these wistful lyrics to a melancholy tune whispering the ambiguities of romance—"Waiting at the End of the Road." The title also portends another basic American imaginative process: visualizing apocalypse, U.S.A.-style. Since the mid-nineteenth century we have been a profoundly future-oriented and apparently boundlessly optimistic people, seeing a Dynamo (or a Ford), not the Virgin, in our collective future, envisioning the world-to-be rather than the world-that-was. A people beached in the seventeenth century on a roadless new continent, we rapidly developed visionary roadmaps guiding us to a world forever being born. Yet tucked into our basic Yankee-ingenuity-"can-do" attitude has always been a whisper of ambivalence, an undertone of uncertainty: Progress may not be going anywhere after all, and our Appointed End may not be Utopia, Inc., but Terminal Disaster. By the 1960s, we could say, "I have seen the future, and it doesn't work." Long ago, there was a suspicion, a lurking dread, that this might be the case.

In Mark Twain's fiction, the ambivalence of American attitudes toward nature and technological change emerges in *Huckleberry Finn* (at one magnetic pole) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (at the antipodes) with *Life on the Mississippi* somewhere near the equator. Hemingway said that all American literature flowed from *Huckleberry Finn*, but there is a powerful subterranean stream that also taps *Connecticut Yankee*, and increasingly authors merge the two visions, the natural American and the tool-made American yoked in a stereoscopic view. Huck says, "It's lovely on a raft," floating down the violent, slavery-ridden continent on the broad brown bosom of the Old Man, the rivergod, and ultimately lighting out for the Territory ahead of the rest, on into untouched nature, away from vile humankind. *Connecticut Yankee* reveals the *other* American dream: the world reshaped, retooled by scientific truth, the nasty Middle Ages tinkered into habitability by a master inventor-handyman. Yet the story ends not with escape into freedom but with a bloodbath, the catastrophic slaughter of Camelot's defenders and enemies, a hecatomb of chivalry, a ripe fulfillment of the King of Brobdingnag's dire judgment that we humans are the "most pernicious Race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth." The novel ends in a miasma of profound melancholy about lost worlds of the Middle Ages *and* the nineteenth century.

Setting aside routine magazine science fiction and disaster epics, there has been a resurgence of Twain's dual themes in the years since Hiroshima-Nagasaki revealed to us the full provenance of apocalypse. We know *how* the world can end, if not *why*, and we know how totally we have ravaged the Territory since Huck dreamt it into existence. The imagination of life in the raw, of the State of Nature, has altered as we view it against the brute face of apocalypse.

One of the latest explorations of the double theme is Paul Theroux's *The Mosquito Coast* (1982), a vital, vibrantly imagined novel that resonates with such diverse works as George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Peter Matthiessen's *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1965), Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), Robie Macauley's *A Secret History of Time to Come* (1979) and the fiction of writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Edward Abbey and Thomas Pynchon.[1] Using Theroux's novel as a baseline, I want to explore contemporary fiction envisioning the precise shape of doom and the connections between life in the raw and the tool-making drives of humanity. All aboard the Last Express for Noble Savage, *homo faber*, New Adam, Robinson Crusoe and all points West!

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1. Fillerup with Hi-Tech

Prime images in this mosaic of nature and catastrophe are of wilderness/nature contrasted to city/technical, fecund/organic opposed to sterile/mechanical. The core human image is of Robinson Crusoe or (more aptly) the Swiss Family Robinson—the tiny band, last family or saving remnant of humanity, cut loose from the civilized world but not entirely bereft of techniculture (Crusoe and the Robinsons had boatloads of tools and goods). The problem stated is that of Twain's Connecticut Yankee: reconstruction of modern culture in a post-apocalypse world.

The Mosquito Coast is an epitome of these themes: it describes the reckless anabasis of Allie Fox (called "Father") and his family (Charlie, Jerry, twins April and Clover, and his wife, called only "Mother") from Massachusetts to Honduras, from civilization to the remote end of the world. Father is an autodidact inventor, a polemicist, possessed of great intuitive ability with mechanics

1 Works referred to in the text are: Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982); George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides* (New York: Fawcett Crest, n.d.); Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York: Bantam, 1961); Peter Matthiessen, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (New York: Signet, 1967); Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York: Bantam, 1975); Robie Macauley, *A Secret History of Time to Come* (New York: Knopf, 1979). All page references are to these editions.

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and a fierce Protestant-antinomian agnosticism:

> Father, an inventor, was a perfect genius with anything mechanical. "Nine patents," he liked to say. "Six pending." He boasted that he had dropped out of Harvard in order to get a good education. He was prouder of his first job as a janitor than his Harvard scholarship. . . . What he liked best was taking things apart, even books, even the Bible. He said the Bible was like an owner's guide, a repair manual to an unfinished invention. It was Father's theory that there were parts of the Bible that no one had ever read, just as there were parts of the world where no one had ever set foot. (p. 7)

(The narrative voice here is Charlie, a Huck-Finn-like observer of the mysterious adult and supra-adult world of his Father.) Father gathers his primal hand, bids *adieu* to the corrupt, self-blinded and collapsing civilization of America, in search of elbow room (the Territory) and, surprisingly, a *tabula rasa*—new worlds on which to etch himself via his creative "appropriate" technology. He is a self-exiled Crusoe, a Yankee in search of benighted worlds to reform:

> "If there's space we'll be happy. We ran out of space in America, and I said, 'Let's go!' People don't normally say that. People say they want a new life. So they go to Pittsburgh. What kind of new life is that? Or they go to Florida, and they think they're emigrating." (p. 76)

Father has invented a super-efficient refrigerator which runs on a low-energy kerosene flame. He calls the device a "worm tub" for its coiled innards (Charlie sees it as a Golem or mechanical man constructed in his father's image) and then redubs it "Fat Boy." (The Hiroshima atom bomb was codenamed "Little Boy," the Nagasaki weapon "Fat Man": this gadget, which later becomes a devastating explosive device, is in name a synthesis of the two.) He goes South to the tropics to make ice from fire for the "savages" he believes the Hondurans to be. He is steadfast in his vast Promethean convictions.

An obsessive and idealistic Don Quixote, Father Fox ("crazy like a fox") buys a deserted jungle camp and drives his family and the natives into building it into a comfortable if primitive farm. He erects a huge Fat Boy freezer, a riverboat, pumps, privies, a tiny self-enclosed civilization. Meanwhile, the children discover a glade in the jungle where they can live wholly naturally, their own Eden-within-the-Garden. They begin to act out a parable of child-innocence like those in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or Richard Hughes's *A High Wind in Jamaica*. Father's attitude toward nature is ambiguous, and he calls them "monkeys" if they eschew the constant manic activity of home-building and tinkering. All activity must contribute to Father's grandiose attempt to recreate creation, to compensate for the defects Father sees in the natural and human conditions:

> "Man sprang out of the faulty world, Charlie. Therefore, I'm imperfect. What's the use? It's a bad design, the human body. Skin's not thick enough, bones aren't strong enough, too little hair, no claws, no fangs. Drop us and we break! Why we're not even symmetrical. One foot bigger than the other, left-handed, right-handed, our noses run. Look where our heart is. We weren't meant to stand up straight—our posture exposes the most sensitive parts of the body, heart and genitals. We should be on all fours, hairier, more resistant to heat and cold, with tails." (pp. 365-66)

If God had only been a decent engineer, we *would* have been monkeys, or better yet, Yahoos.

Allie Fox *is* crazy like a fox[2]—a radically self-divided character who tries to focus himself on the freedom in nature while clinging to the security of technology. He echoes Pirsig's nameless father-hero in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, a retooled schizophrenic whose old self (erased by electro-convulsive therapy) is named Phaedrus ("the wolf"). Allie is a graduate of ECT, too. Pirsig's progatonist also meditates on the alchemical possibilities of technology, the need for a mystic union with the machine as strong as our ties with nature:

> The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha—which is to demean oneself. (*Zen*, p. 18)

This narrator-actor plunges into his own past, on a spiritual journey that is likened to the ride in Goethe's *Erlkoenig*, a pilgrimage which is also a flight from demons. Allie Fox flees his own demons, the world around him which reflects his own failings, as he drives into the heart of darkness.

Allie is manic, compulsive, cannot stop tinkering, "improving" on creation. When his Eden is invaded by armed guerillas (he has led them there), the nominally pacific Allie decides he must destroy them. He forces Charlie to lock them in Fat Boy and light it, to freeze them ("making ice from fire"). The men struggle, fire their weapons, and Fat Boy turns into an ammonia-and-hydrogen bomb, erupting to kill the men and hurl fire and poison across the jungle. The devastating "fall-out" ruins Allie's outpost of progress.

Allie is filled with enormous *hubris:* he wants to eat the world and have it too, to live alone as a nomad/monad, an isolate, and to be a leader of men, an architect of society. He imports the machine into the garden, unleases his demons, makes a useless miracle (there is little *use* for ice in the jungle) and ultimately calls down catastrophe on himself, his family and the hapless natives who have gathered around his magic.

This is a tiny Cold War apologue ("we had to destroy the village to save the village"), and Allie Fox is a Massachusetts Faustus in King Log's Court. He desecrates nature in the name of his righteousness, drives his family to the brink of his own paranoia, alternates between manic messianism and depressive self-mutilation, Robinson Crusoe with an amputated trigger-finger.

2. The Well at World's End

Allie Fox is a self-sufficient, self-enclosed creature. As Father he is Blake's Old Nobodaddy, the dictatorial, suprarational and ineffectual God-figure. Like Robinson Crusoe, he is the type of Economic Man, self-centered acquisitiveness.[3] His first glimpse of the jungle turns instantly to his own hermetic vision of man-made order:

2 See Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (New York: Mentor, 1957) for a penetrating discussion of fox-vision (reality as Many) vs. hedgehog-vision (reality as One).

3 The classic exposition of the Crusoe theme as an analysis of bourgeois culture is Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), Chapters 3-4.

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> "I see a house here," he said. "Kind of a barn there, with a workshop—a real blacksmith's shop, with a forge. Over there, the outhouse and plant. Slash and burn the whole area and we've got four or five acres of good growing land. We'll put our water tank on that rise and we'll divert part of the stream so we get some water into those fields. We'll have to lose some of these trees, but there's plenty more, and anyway we'll need timber for a bridge." (p. 131)

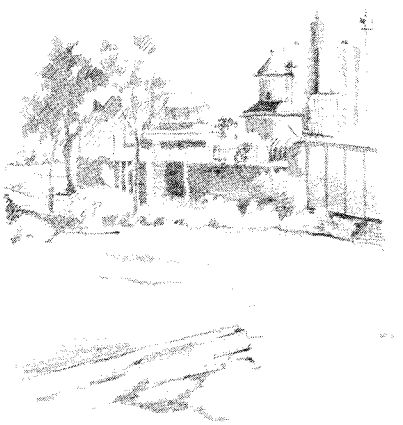
It is the settling of America over again, dictated by the insufferable, stultifying egoism that shapes Allie's ethic, even when it is directed toward the salvation of his family. We know too much about messianic father-figures who want to "save" their families in the jungle.

Allie becomes a full-fledged Survivalist, asserting first that U.S. culture is doomed, then that the country is literally collapsing, and finally that it has been destroyed in a holocaust. Allie retreats into this solipsistic endgame pattern of paranoia. He dreams of drilling a bore-hole to the center of the earth to tap geothermal power, and he reaches into himself to tap the bottomless energy and drive of unleashed ego.

Pitted against him in the jungle is the Reverend Spellgood, a missionary with an airplane, a jeep and videocassettes of the Good News—all Allie's technicultural nemeses rolled into one emblem. Spellgood (anagrammatic: Goodspell = Godspell = Gospel) is an archetypal Elmer Gantry boob-dogooder, and his family is a polystyrene government-issue middle American mirror-image of the untidy Fox clan. As in Matthiessen's remarkable *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, these fumbling bourgeois Christians simply erode the minimal native culture, delude themselves that they are saving souls and implant a dismal pocket of the twentieth century in a Stone Age milieu. In the end, Spellgood blindly shoots Allie Fox, after Allie's Luddite attack on the mission generator and Cessna. (In Matthiessen's novel, a drop-out technologist and mercenary fighter-pilot, appositely named "Wolfie," is a similar angel of destruction to a missionary band.)

The image of *The Mosquito Coast* is that *both* Allie and Spellgood operate with the blinding magic of high technology. Allie, without reconciling himself to the hard facts of nature, becomes more and more a Luddite, a Hobbesian Man in the State of Nature, whose life is nasty, brutish and short. Only the works of *his* hands are valuable. Manufactured goods, all the excesses of mass production, come to represent "natural evil" as much as the floods, droughts and windstorms Allie battles. Spellgood, on the other hand, charms the natives, spellbinds them with color TV, jeeps, air-conditioning. His is the faith that *works* (so long as the generator runs).

Theroux plays with the paradoxes of a fundamentalist mission carried by state-of-the-art technology "from Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand," not as intensely as Matthiessen but with the same goal: to demonstrate that the "progressive" intrusion of modern culture into simple societies, whether in God's name or Mammon's, is wholly destructive, and that fragile systems of culture or ecology buckle and collapse under the assault. Ironically, Allie Fox is also an arrant intruder, with his do-it-yourself technotheocratic religion as much an alien



imposition as Spellgood's crude theology of *schlock*.

The contention of materialized religion and theologized technocracy in *The Mosquito Coast*, then, reflects the "true believer" mentality in two forms—both Allie and Spellgood are fanatics, both gripped by perverse visions of salvation. Allie's is the perfection of an imperfect world (he seeks to reverse the Fall, to extirpate Sin in the form of bad design and production error), patching up the mess God left when He rested on the seventh day. Spellgood's is the redemption of the natives, crude, unwashed and untaught, less than human because less than middle-class American. While Allie's is the more intelligent critique of their world, both views are fatally reductionistic.

At Allie's death, his family is released from his spell, and they can return to an orbit of sane existence in this fallen world. They have endured the worst traumas raw nature can inflict on them, and they have survived Allie's increasingly demented "lifeboat ethics" ordeal in the jungle. When Charlie is told that the world beyond the Honduran jungle has not been obliterated, he experiences a kind of existential resurrection.

> I said, "My father says America's been wiped out. There's no one left but us. Because we're here. That's what he said."
>
> That's stupid," Emily said.
>
> A whole country rose up and began to shine the moment she spoke those simple words. And Father seemed tiny and scuttling, like a cockroach when a light goes on. (pp. 350-51)

We re-emerge from a world of hostile, paranoid delusion into the realm of everyday existence at the end of *The Mosquito Coast* with a catharsis, back from the heart of darkness, from the lip of the precipice at the edge of the world. There is a human comfort in the compromising and compromised life of the nonfanatic, the "scavengers" of our culture against whom Allie Fox preaches, those of us who live off the secular miracles of technology without enquiring into their teleological costs.

3. Territory Ahead

We have a copious and ever-expanding literature of the *facts* of holocaust, from such considerations of the Nazi experiment as Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* to meditations on our immediate situation like Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*. We also have a large body of science fiction imagining World War III and after. Increasingly, writers outside the science fiction genre have turned to themes of imminent apocalypse and a post-apocalypse world. Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is nominally science fiction, although it fits uneasily in that mold. It is much more a philosophic discursion on the endurance of faith, especially the form and substance of the Roman Catholic Church, as defined in the high Middle Ages. It is an extension of the *Connecticut Yankee schema:* a description of the gradual renaissance of science, mathematics and technology in the millenia

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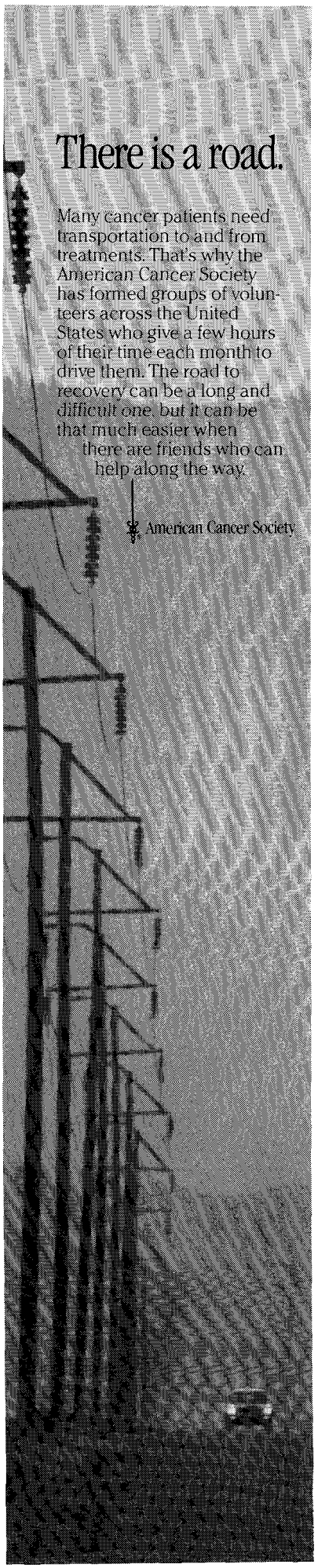
There is a road.
Many cancer patients need transportation to and from treatments. That's why the American Cancer Society has formed groups of volunteers across the United States who give a few hours of their time each month to drive them. The road to recovery can be a long and difficult one, but it can be that much easier when there are friends who can help along the way.
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beyond a twentieth-century apocalypse (the "Flame Deluge"). The story recounts the cyclical recapitulation of Western history as the Church preserves and slowly rediscovers and disseminates the *principia* of high technology. The narrative ends on the eve of another nuclear holocaust, while a shipload of brothers from the Order of St. Leibowitz (a Jewish martyr in the first nuclear debacle) are launched toward the stars, to carry the faith (and the seeds of technical knowledge) onward. Humanity seems locked in a cycle of redemptive suffering, faith and self-destructive knowledge.

The Mosquito Coast implies the same potential for beliefs and self-immolation. Allie Fox's faith is in himself and the devices he can conceive and build. His God is dead, after absconding, and Allie is a misanthrope who dislikes and fears nature (his constant ideal is to sleep in his own bed). Like Sir Boss in *Connecticut Yankee,* he can only lead, never follow, and he depends wholly on his own ingenuity and talents. Because he is unbalanced, if not unhinged, by the assaults of American techniculture on his sensibilities, Allie is unable to understand himself or his own weaknesses. When the rainy season strikes the Foxes' seacoast camp, he is reduced to rebuilding and toying with a salvaged outboard motor to maintain his sanity, twirling its starter over and over, though it lacks spark plug and fuel. It is the perfect emblem of technical futility—a sophisticated utilitarian device transformed into a whirligig. Allie's strongest epithet is "scavengers!" and he (like Coleridge's frustrated Mariner) murders innocent seabirds because they remind him of his own position as a parasite on the vast decaying corpse of high technological culture, a worm in the bowels of decaying Leviathan.

George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* faces some of the same issues. By positing a non-nuclear holocaust, a worldwide lethal plague, Stewart creates a post-apocalypse milieu with a tiny remnant of humanity left in the largely intact modern world. He locates a band in San Francisco ("where the weather's fair," Irving Berlin reported in 1910 in "The Grizzly Bear") who become The Tribe, led by Isherwood Williams, a geologist and student of ecology. Ish (= *Man, Adam*) becomes the Father of this new race and tries to revive the techniculture still visible around them. The Tribe, however, opts for a pastoral hunting-gathering-scavenging life, existing off the detritus of the lost twentieth-century world, refusing to re-invent the wheel or even to tend to the crumbling monuments of civilization. Ish desperately creates regimens of education and "development" (as in "under-developed nation"), but the living is easy, and only his son Joey has a spark of intellectual curiosity and technical-Faustian ambition.

Joey, however, dies in a second plague (simple typhus arising from deteriorating sanitation), and Ish is devastated. He has been called like Abraham to sacrifice his best-loved son, and this time there is no ram in the thicket. Ish, at this juncture, seems to despair and loosens his hold on The Tribe. Then human processes begin to work well: he shows the children how to make and "play with" a bow and arrow, and The Tribe is sent on its way to technological evolution, and Ish's true role of leadership and prophecy has been fulfilled. The Tribe grows in accommodation to redeveloping natural ecologies, evolves its own laws and mores, and a new world emerges from the gradually eroding ruins of our civilization. The novel's title, from *Ecclesiastes* 1:4, sets the tone and theme: that processes of history and time are permanent and inexorable and that humankind fits *inside* that system-of-systems we call Nature, that Earth *will* abide if humans do not willfully obliterate it.

The Mosquito Coast reflects this concern with humankind's destructive impact on the planetary tissue. Allie panics at the accelerating erosion of resources and "living room," and his flight to Honduras is a search for a new Eden. What he finds is Hobbes's State of Nature, with starveling natives caught somewhere between civilization and outright primitivism, plagues of insects, a harsh tropical climate, a tortured landscape. Allie's dream of accommodation by handicraft to the exigencies of raw nature collapses, and he is left like Poor Tom in *King Lear,* the unaccommodated man, a poor forked animal, the thing itself. There is no middle way of meliorism in Allie's worldview. At the end, he is left (literally) a "talking head" by Reverend Spellgood's bullet, paralyzed and raving in dying dementia. It is an apt over-arching metaphor for the slow

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death of technology: the last thing to go is the cognitive, rationalistic, verbalizing, computational function—a head disconnected from the enabling body, from sensation, from nature.

The territory ahead, the world beyond catastrophe, turns out to be disillusion and death. "The world is all the case there is," Thomas Pynchon quotes Wittgenstein in *V.* Allie Fox runs to the ends of the earth, the edge of the world, but there is nowhere else to go. He recognizes this reality and mocks the Buck Rogers dreams of the "space program"—yet himself wants to give nature and technology (those two dense ecologies, interlocked systems-of-systems) human faces. He dies in his madness, freeing his family, his little tribe, to return to the flow of history, the contradictory and intractable realities of the twentieth century. After enunciating a terrible dictum—"Christ is a scarecrow!" (p. 367)—Allie crawls away and is ravaged by the scavenging birds he so despised, passing from life through death into nature. Like his beloved gadgets, nature is wholly efficient—there is no waste, no loss, in the intermeshed systems of creation and destruction. Viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, biological existence is one hundred percent efficient, and Allie Fox's fierce individualistic antinomianism is just one more thing not-new under the sun.

Paul Theroux's vision in *The Mosquito Coast* concludes with Charlie Fox meditating on the scarifying experience he has passed through:

> Grief is a later feeling, as the sadness sifts down and makes your memory heavy and hopeless. It was too early for us to feel anything except the shock of relief, the leftover pain. We had been skinned alive and were raw. We had come through a fire, we still burned. . . . The world was all right, no better and no worse than we had left it—though after what Father had told us, what we saw was like splendor. (p. 374)

The world is with us, late and soon, and we must return to it saner than Father, saner than the Houyhnhnm-deluded Gulliver, if we are to survive and tend to our stewardship. The territory ahead, like the Kingdom of God, is at hand, it is very near, it is within us.

We cannot, like Twain's Sir Boss or Pirsig's Phaedrus or Peter Matthiessen's Wolfie or Theroux's Allie

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Fox, live only to impose technical order on the world. To do so is to pursue the ultimate self-delusion. Nor can we escape the densely-settled earth and find another Eden, a pleasant desert isle without its resident Caliban, to nurture us. The flaming sword drove us from our Garden, and now we grip the sword ourselves, its fierce flames blinding and searing us. We can empathize with Allie Fox's personalized anger and frustration and his heroic attempt to seize his fate in his own hands. But that way madness—and scavenging—lies, through a door marked firmly NO EXIT HERE.

—*William J. Schafer*

The Literature of Absence

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Superbounce, by Tom Ahern. Burning Deck Press. $3.00.

In his study of the fantastic in literature, Tzvetan Todorov reminds us:

> (L)iterature is not representative in the same sense that certain sentences of everyday speech may be representative, for literature does not refer . . . to anything outside itself.

In this passage, Todorov speaks of literature in general as a non-representative art form, but his book *The Fantastic* is devoted to those literary works that are perhaps the most overtly nonrepresentational—texts of the impossible, of the absent, of the "not," texts which do not and cannot point beyond themselves to a corresponding reality because that reality does not and cannot exist. Unlike works in the realist tradition that present characters, settings, and situations that seemingly could find counterparts in the world beyond language, these texts of the imagination (tales of science fiction, fantasy, the supernatural, etc.) create worlds that could only exist *in words*. Such works are purely and avowedly verbal, restricted to the surface of the page, and the worlds they speak into being are paper worlds.

What we might call the literature of absence covers a broad range of possible texts, from science fiction (the not-yet) and sword-and-sorcery (the no-longer) to the uncanny and the supernatural (the not-at-all), but these texts share a common dependence on the language that makes the impossible possible, at least to the reader who enters these paper realms. As Todorov notes, "language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent," and these tales are devoted to the perennially absent—the distant future, the distant past, ghosts, demons, vampires, contradictions, impossibilities—that which is and only is insofar as it is spoken. As such, texts of absence are clearly self-referential, always calling attention to their own verbal structure by denying the reader the option of comparing what he reads to the world beyond the page. In the opening sentence of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"—"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect"—the reader finds that he is in a place and time that are radically other, a place and time that are only the words he reads and that exist only as he reads them into being. The literature of absence is self-consciously artificial, always aware of itself as a negativity, a structure of language in a real world that is perennially present and does not seem to need language in order to exist.

While realism is a relatively recent literary development, the literature of absence is rooted in the very origin of story telling, fable, and myth—and perhaps even in the origin of language itself. No doubt this is why so many contemporary writers (Borges, Calvino, Lem, and others) continue to explore the imaginative possibilities of a language that is not intended to represent the real. In our time, science fiction is the most prevalent form of the literature of absence—the literature of the future, of the not-yet. And Thomas M. Disch is a master of the form. His *Ringtime* and Richard A. Lupoff's *Stroka Prospekt* are the first volumes in the "Singularities" series from Toothpaste Press, a number of beautifully illustrated and handset chapbooks edited by Disch and designed to present works of SF in a setting that has usually been reserved only for "serious" literature.

Though readers of SF often judge works in the genre according to standards of "realism" or "believability," science fiction is neither realistic nor believable. Rather, at its best, it is coherent—a formal structure of language, self-contained, "a kind of mathematics," in Disch's words. The work of science fiction begins with a premise—that intergalactic or time travel is possible, that alien beings exist—and this purely verbal hypothesis then generates a paper world in which the premise is "true." Like an abstract problem in math, the SF text is not intended to refer beyond itself, only to be consistent within its own realm. It is, admittedly, a story, a fiction, a verbal structure that creates not reality or something like reality but only itself.

The SF text continually calls attention to itself as story, as language, not only because it often creates a new futuristic vocabulary that does not refer to the reader's world but because it self-consciously presents the not-yet as if it were the here-and-now, as if absence were presence, though the presence of the tale and the presence of reality never coincide. Disch particularly enjoys betraying the storiness of his stories. In *Ringtime*, and in his recent collections, he has included introductions that explain how the texts came to be written, providing boundaries for the stories themselves and setting them apart in their own fictive realm. Even in the tales themselves, Disch does not allow the reader to forget that what he reads is fiction. The opening of *Ringtime*—"One day (my story begins)"—reminds the reader of the story's storiness and encourages him not to believe, even for a moment, that what he reads is anything but words.

Disch's premise here is that, in an America of the future, the prevalent art medium is the finger ring recording—a memory device that can record the thoughts and sensations of the original wearer, then play them back through the nervous system of whoever puts the ring on. The narrator is a once-successful ring artist who has fallen on hard times and now resorts to traffic in "hot" rings—those that have recorded the commission of crimes and other forbidden acts. *Ringtime* is a fascinating story of experience, memory, voyeurism, and the

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possibilities of self in a world where thought and sensation are no longer personal and where the ring artist's experiences are available to everyone, though the act of recording erases his own memories of his life.

Lupoff's futuristic story of Soviet interplanetary miners on leave is not as successful. Viktor Patsayev is obsessed with the Polnyiks, a forbidden race of extra-terrestrials kept apart from humans by the Soviet government, and his final sexual contact with an alien is erotic and powerful. But the story lacks the mathematical/linguistic precision of the best science fiction, and though the main characters have Russian names, the tale would not be essentially different if they were French, British, or Martian. Lupoff's paper world never becomes fully present.

Though a few of the stories in James B. Hall's collection are in the realist tradition, most are tales of the not-yet or the not-at-all. Hall's stories of the future read like documents from an absent time, recorded in the first person by characters who create and are created by those paper worlds. His narrators write for us in the language of their own fictive realms, as if we lived there, too, and the result is a series of coded messages that generate and define the artificial worlds the reader is called upon to decipher and bring into being.

"Valley of the Kilns" is a marvelous story of primitive workers who escape from slavery to live in freedom in the mountain caves. At first the tale seems to be set in the prehistoric past. Then the narrator explains the conditions of his servitude.

> Besides our identical matching headbands, each man had a device implanted in the upper arm. At certain hours these devices made "music"; at others, especially at night, they merely hummed and we knew happily that something was listening.

The high technology points to a distant future, another time, perhaps after a nuclear holocaust when the population is divided into masters and slaves, controllers and controlled. "A Rumor of Metal" is set in the same world, though this time the narrator is one of the controllers whose job it is to police the primitive tribes of "americans" along the Gulf of Mexico and make sure that they never again discover how to manufacture the metal that would allow them to develop beyond their simple tribal cultures and control their own lives—and perhaps go to war again. In "My Work in California," the narrator is a tour guide in a futuristic "test tube baby" plant where good citizens are reared from fetus to adulthood. The grounds are full of wonderous and mysterious phenomena, and, as the narrator explains: "Disneyland [is] not so far away." These and Hall's other fantasy tales raise more questions than they answer. In fact, they explain nothing. Like the texts of ancient and forgotten cultures, these verbal remnants of the distant future simply are.

The stories in Brian Swann's *Unreal Estate* explore the possibilities of a literature of absence beyond the traditional genres of science fiction and fantasy. Swann's paper worlds are the products of verbal juxtapositions which generate new "realities" that are neither past nor future but curiously out of time and that exist and can exist only on the surface of the page. "The Golden Age" is a tale of the fathers of 18th Century British agriculture—Tull, Townsend, and Coke—who have gathered together in an ahistorical moment of history. It is "August of 1718," and yet two of the characters claim to have been born in 1752, and one of them quotes from a book written in 1770. The main character seems to be only another member of the landed gentry at first, but by the end of the story he has somehow become a lowly academician, hoping to make Associate Professor with the treatise he plans to write on the great moment he is sharing. Quite suddenly he is neither British nor of the 18th Century ("He wished he had his typewriter with him for the transcript"), and the "reality" of this historic (and impossible) event is erased even as it is written, much as every historical text structures, falsifies, and erases the absent past it hopes to describe.

"Magic" is set in a prison where the main character finds that he can make gold coins appear and disappear at his fingertips. Like the reader in the real world, visitors from outside the prison walls try to explain away this impossibility as a simple trick, an illusion. Only his fellow prisoners believe, for they share the hero's paper world where such things can happen, at least in words. And so, though he is free to go, he chooses to remain in prison—in the story and on the page.

The text "Cameo" describes a mechanical piece of jewelry that acts out a story, the very story that "Cameo" tells. This tale and the others in the collection are language machines that, like the extraordinary devices in the works of Raymond Roussel, create only themselves. Swann's stories are perfect structures of language, containers of absence and impossibility and yet present on the page and available to the reader who is warned "that he should not take the phrases as referential . . . beware of trying to make a consistent emotional sense of the words, of any words."

The stories in Tom Ahern's *Superbounce* also explore the possibility of creating the not possible—the absent—in words. Like Swann, Ahern uses the juxtaposition of verbal images to create paper worlds that are neither past nor future. He is a master of linking the impossible and the factual ("I just dropped dead, she said. It was 1965 . . ."), thus calling into question the very facticity of what we call facts and suggesting that the world we call real could be only paper after all. "Popeye in the 19th Century" puts the comic strip character of our own time—a fact of our age, though a fictive one—into the time and literary language of a hundred years ago, creating a spark between a present fiction and an absent one. These, too, are fantasy tales, existing only on the page, creating worlds in much the same way we have created ours—by putting words together.

The literature of absence may be more realistic than it seems, for like the realities of science fiction and fantasy our own reality may be a reality of words, a spoken world, neither more nor less real than the timeless times and impossible places of Disch, Lupoff, Hall, Swann, and Ahern. Words may well create not only absence but presence—our presence, our facts. In the story "Living Phonetically," Brian Swann's narrator explains the importance of the paper worlds of literature and of the "real" world which we also seem to speak into being: "all my noise adds up to silence. i am afraid of silence. i fill it as best i can."

—*Welch D. Everman*

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Nine Story-Tellers

Special Offer, by Jerry Bumpus. Carpenter Press. $5
Daffodils or the Death of Love, by Corinne Demas Bliss. Missouri. $6.95
The Silence of the Llano, by Rudolfo A. Anaya. Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol. $8
The Woe Shirt, by Paule Barton. Graywolf. $5
The Winnebago Mysteries, by Moira Crone. Fiction Collective. $4.95
From the Bottom Up, by Leigh Allison Wilson. Georgia. $12.95
Short Fictions, by Alvah Bessie. Chandler & Sharp. $7.95
I Smell Esther Williams, by Mark Leyner. Fiction Collective. $5.95
Fireworks, by Angela Carter. Harper Colophon. $4.25

You never know in what little magazine or anthology you'll find a Jerry Bumpus story. Fortunately, Carpenter Press has published a collection of them in *Special Offer*, his first since *Things in Place*. Bumpus's stories are like uninvited guests who bring a needed house gift, or dubious brothers-in-law who touch us up for a loan and then, surprise!, come through, plus interest.

His style is clear and simple, deceptively so, full of details endemic to the peculiar Bumpusian narrative ("He smelled the house's odors of krout, dust, and old woman."). Bumpus has as much in common with Saki as he does with Guignol, and his beguiling stories proceed down bumpy roads, uneventfully, until something happens—the road curves, smooths, disappears—not unexpectedly, but as if we had been waiting for it to happen all along.

We meet the most queer, eccentric characters—the concupiscent Candyman who has dangling from one earlobe "a delicate purple penis with precise rhinestone testicles" on a gold ring, foreshadowing the Candyman's own bizarre castration and resurrection as a messiah of kitsch needed to bring "people" to a world of neon and "great mounds of vinyl, wood, leather." These are characters trapped inside closets, under beds, within penumbra resembling houses, nightmares resembling dreams. Some stories have the feel of 1940s cinema noir ("The Angel Business," for instance), of whose dramatis personae we "would make a horrible discovery" if we "looked only a little deeper."

The incapacitated, the fanatical, the nine-cents-short-of-a-dime, the "others" form the matrix of society—the "sane" the object of their desires. In "The Love of Beasts," a minister's wife becomes puppet to the covetousness of the men around her: "She has proven she is capable only of base love, arrogant, prideful, the love of beasts." The victim becomes assimilated in a world where "the sky is a thick intersticing of snake scales."

Bumpus demonstrates that more often the commonplace is grotesque. Cannibals are more civilized than the missionary Christians and their ludicrous "Boy Lessons" of the Christ child. In "With the Mory Bot," a proselytizer fails to see that his martyrdom is just another man's meal, cannot see that his faith is just "special words . . . things backwards, stories about animals and night." Bumpus will conjure up a rat and a frog and a snake in a highly stylized manner, letting language render an inappropriate ground situation appropriately. His stories are like an exhibit of tattoos at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In stories like "Pizeop" and "The Fudgers" the mental wards and surrealistic suburbs seem like home. Only here can "ho tuy" transform one into a "great glittering flash, a metallic contraption, complicated, impossible, and beautiful;" only here "pinu on lequey" can grow into newcomers "so friendly, they always waved as they went by and even called hello if you gave them a chance;" only here "all things, including pizeop, swirled in constant, relentless meaning." Pure imagination and whimsy.

In "On the Emperor's Birthday," a shipwrecked little magazine editor is taken aboard a Japanese destroyer during WW II only to become "the ship's writer." The story seems to create itself as it is being related, "caught up by the sound of the words amplified across the sea, and that implacability of things happening as they must," for the writer does indeed get an opportunity to read his story on the emperor's birthday, his "faith reaffirmed."

The collection's best story, though, is "Mrs. Bell and Her Dog," about an insecure dwarf who is victimized by his landlady's vicious beast, who eats weiners stuffed inside a loaf of day-old bread. The dog traps the man, who gets little sympathy from his landlady (who had a "hint of a grin moving beneath the flesh caked on her face")—a man already trapped inside a world in which he cannot fit. His reality becomes dwarfed further, and he is unable to leave his tiny room even to relieve his urine, which he must soak into his shirt. We experience our own sense of entrapment in which we find ourselves "staring straight ahead into the darkness." Bumpus's stories suck us in, but they are, as one of his characters puts it, "unexactly earthshaking, but fun, you see, and definitely dignified."

Corinne Demas Bliss's special gift is to render through delicate description, without hint of explanation, stories of rare insight, that come to us in the tones of conversation, as if over coffee and the tinkling of spoons.

In *Daffodils or the Death of Love* Bliss focuses mainly on women, family relationships, mother-daughter strife, the quarrels and qualms of lovers. These are pieces fraught with secrets and silences (secrets an impending metaphor), such as that of the daughter who will "tell her mother nothing" in spite of the fact, as her mother warns her, "We will be exactly the same. And there is nothing you can do to change that." Lovers move in these stories from one to the other as one may walk from room to room in a house, or like rabbits. We listen constantly to the unsatisfied, restless human heart, beating in measured time like a metronome: a mother and daughter, unable to put their differences behind them; a daughter unable to forget that their house was built for whom they were not: "A family that didn't mind thin walls, because they never raised their voices, or cheap doors, because they never slammed them."

"Lester Schwabb I, II, III, IV, & V" is a real delight. A teacher must deal with permutations of her "male student"—class dunce, pariah, teacher's pet, protege, and paramour, until, finally, he is just another student phone message in her mailbox. In another story, a woman responds to the death of her father by ravenously consuming a mushroom-

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cheese pizza, struggling also to piece together parts of her own life, which has become sliced and compartmentalized. Ironies pile onto this story like extra toppings. We learn that in her father's illness, he had been starved to death to hasten the cancer's dirty work and that she had hardly known the man at all. Feeling spirtually starved, she sleeps, sleep a kind of staying motion in Bliss's fiction.

"Secrets" is a marvelous story, one of the book's bright spots. A young girl ventures with her mother and father to her girlfriend's family's nudist colony, a secret the mother informs the daughter that she must keep. Bliss evokes this experience quite believably: the mother wearing a beach towel because "she was cold," the father making a pass at the friend's mother ("You don't understand the purpose of this place."). The young girl learns in a day a lifetime of adult secrets, which can never be inviolable. Intuitively, the girl begins to understand that secrets like the one about her father (she had seen him with her friend's mother) will be revealed just as easily as the one about her friend which she reveals, though she promised she would not. In a rare simile, Bliss has the girl fall asleep amidst her growing awareness ("My parents didn't speak the whole way home"), "the windshield wipers moving like magic wands over the rain."

When her characters must pursue things because of symbols in a dream—relinquishing things they should have never given up (a child, a lover), sleep becomes a response. A woman who searches for what "would not be anything but the beginning of what she was looking for . . . crawls into bed and tries to sleep it through."

"Lifelines," the most moving story in the collection, is about a woman, just past 30, who takes up the violin as a way of redeeming her life through a beauty that had always "pricked her conscience." She feels ashamed at one point because she has touched the instrument of her instructor, whose warm music she could never recreate. In the hospital, the ailing teacher explains that the violin is second hand ("Why didn't you play it?"). The young woman, who has dismissed her lover ("If the sight of [his] naked shoulders failed to stir me now, after only a year of intimacy, how would I feel about him in another year, a decade, or two?"), learns that she is much like the old woman, one of those who "come to the violin only after they find they can't be good at something else." We, too, feel the second hand nature of our lives—"all dead ends, false starts"—and realize that beauty is something achieved, not given. Like love. These moments of perspective spring up at us, just wisps of meaning in these lovely, observant, realistic stories of Corinne Demas Bliss.

Rudolfo A. Anaya's *The Silence of the Llano* is one of the finest collections of American contemporary fiction to come out of the Southwest. The stories take place in the high plains region of New Mexico, the Llano, whose "silence grew so heavy and oppressive it became unbearable." Hence the title and the stories' principal metaphor.

Anaya's characters are immediately recognizable—comic and tragic. He demonstrates a mastery and great depth of subject, style, and theme. The commonplaces of death, birth, and love reappear to us as new experiences because they are lost "in the vast space of Llano" where "one could find something in which he could lose himself."

His characters must come to grip with isolation, desolation, "the shell of solitude," "the burden of loneliness." Rafael of the title story must wrestle with a silence that pervades his very existence as well as his relationship with his daughter, whom he sees as not only the indirect cause of his wife's death, but also as her very image. When she is raped, the Llano has been violated. Words are mere sounds to the girl, but they are sounds nonetheless; the sound of her name, the sound of her father speaking to her finally crack the silence of the Llano like an eggshell. "It was a good sound that brought joy to his heart."

Elsewhere, the Llano hides dark secrets: the oedipal complexities of "The Road to Platero," the stories of the boy tribes with their rites of passage and the tales of daring they must recite in which nothing may be left out. "He must tell the truth," a young boy knows, but he learns that the truth of "The Place of Swallows" is in the leaving out, not the putting in. So when he recalls the hopeless cry of the mother swallows and the treachery done them, he is cast out. He undergoes yet another initiation, into the real world, in which he must "stand and face the darkness of the river's shadows, and the night through which I must walk alone." In "Solomon's Story," a young boy narrates his version of what occurred when he led the tribe to slay the giant sea turtle that had come ashore to lay its eggs. Decapitating the creature, Solomon had been hailed a hero, but the turtle undauntedly struggled to fulfill its evolutionary purpose and crawled toward the river. In a brilliant descriptive account, Anaya has the turtle rear "up, exposing the gaping hole where the head had been, then it charged, surprisingly swift for its huge size." As Solomon battles the headless turtle, "slipping one hand into the dark bleeding hole," the reptile triumphs in death, "trailing forth blood and bile into the gurgling waters."

Several adolescent tales demonstrate further richness of character and setting. Carefully derived pathos and a lucid prose style carry Anaya's work beyond the trivial in these stories of the class hoodlums who put on a riotous Christmas play or who paste mirrors on their shoetops so they can sneak a peak at prepubescent pudenda. Subjected to peer pressure, a teenage boy attempts the trick on his beautiful teacher, whom he loves and who likes him. She is hurt by the act, miffed, but she finally understands and invites him to "Come and see what a woman is like." It is not so much sexual awareness but more artistic awareness of beauty and truth learned from this experience, rooted in the metaphor of "The Apple Orchard," in the blood of the teacher who had cut her finger on the mirror onto the boy's chin. "I would always keep coming back, to rediscover, to feel smoothness of flesh and bark, to smell hair and flower, to linger as I bathed in beauty. The mystery would always be there, and I would be exploring its form forever."

Several pieces move us, such as "El Velorio," in which a father reclaims the body of his drowned son (an opening passage Marquez would envy)—a father who can do little more than give his son a last remembrance. The velorio is described poignantly, and the old man, Rufus, is treated with respect and kindness by his neighbors, for tomorrow "he would be Rufus again, and the children of the barrio would taunt him as he scavenged in the

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alleys, and they would sing songs about his wife."

There are other stories, narrated by a writer, in which Anaya pokes fun at self-referential fiction: a story about a writer looking for something to write in a room full of people with stories to tell or who want to be characters, as well as "characters on the periphery who also want to get into the story." In another one, a writer who has come to Cuernavaca to write meets someone who might very well be B. Traven, who tells him that "A writer has to follow a story if it leads him to hell itself," and here Anaya plays with the Traven myths, the myths of La Llorona, the myths of Mexican treasures, and the myths that finally make stories.

As in the final story, "The Village Which the Gods Painted Yellow," a character must discover the truth of the Maya, whose mystique he sees as "one more legend in a land of legends." At one point, like the others, he beholds "the image of the golden pyramid," but it is a failure. The price he must pay for seeking this truth is to be crippled, made "their new dwarf, the new magician" of Uxmal. He has become an integral part of the legend himself, and has, like all Anaya's characters, "understood his destiny."

For readers interested in the pure art of storytelling, read Paule Barton's *The Woe Shirt*, thirteen Caribbean folk tales, translated by Howard Norman. Quite a bit of exceptional art has come out of Haiti, Barton's singular among them.

The appeal of these fine tales rests in the fact that they are products of the oral tradition, spoken by the likes of Gambling Joseph, Belem, and Mari, tales that have been translated perfectly into the style and lilting rhythms of the Caribbean tongue. The language is a sheer joy in itself, with unpatterned syntaxes and metaphors as inebriating as rum: "Emilie knew the wound of confusion and no-choice was too deep inside for the salt sea to sting it clean for Belem right now." "But then, quick, a bad mood of jellyfish floated up—it must have been the harking of that bood mood song!" "Obeah-witch was no longer making rude in his heart."

We share in dreams and nightmares and become part of a community of old men arguing to forget what it was they were arguing about (fables with morals). We participate in a gecko trial, where the wisdom of Solomon is imparted in the flight of a bird. We see how impending storms are predicted by what floats ashore from the sea.

Con-men, mendicants, prestidigitators, all become part of the landscape. They are one with the fishermen, one with seabirds, the soothsaying goats, the extinct seahorses who are given new life as postage stamps on coral and voices of the lost voice of an old carnival ventriloquist.

We experience how these tales are passed down and embellished. In "Two Old Men Road," Amos Raymond has been "explaining to some people the one scar on his thumb, two ways." Two old neighbors return home, neither realizing he had been told a different version of the same tale. "And Johni Old Man had his own scorn fish story to tell the *truth* to Paolo. And Paolo Old Man had his own grim vulture story to tell the *truth* to Johni. And they could not hear Amos Raymond from where they lived."

In the title story, Barton tells us of characters who are compelled, like Belem, to buy shirts on which are "memories he knew of things familiar . . . days past, all sewn on the shirts." To buy them, however, is to "remember good by forgetting bad, and the other way around" and to become poor in the buying. But Barton's tales are woe shirts themselves, each one a "memory rich memory." Belem will now beg in his woe shirt, and a woe shirt will be sewn of Belem begging in the market, just as a tale will be told of Belem buying his woe shirt to beg in the market. . . .

At the heart of Moira Crone's *The Winnebago Mysteries* is the structure of the family and the mother-daughter relationship. (After all, "it's a full-time job to ruin your child.") Crone is not as effective in these stories as Corinne Bliss is in hers, but many of Crone's pieces work because the filial relationship is often set off against other relationships: husband/wife, boyfriend/father. When her imagination is fertile, Crone's stories come to life.

In "Cleanliness," a daughter's house becomes the metaphor for her life, which her mother feels she must keep clean, particularly the cellar wherein dwells "whatever is at the bottom of life." It becomes as though the daughter shrinks to the size of a ball and the mother looms larger than the house itself: "the upstairs windows were her two open eyes, looking out."

Crone permits the tenor of these relationships to signal different themes, such as the lies that so often speak the truth. In "The Brooklyn Lie," a young girl whose family does not like or understand her feels that the only way of getting out from underneath them is to fib that she's pregnant by a boy they do not like. The lie does the trick, but the girl and her family experience a new awkwardness ("Everyone told me they loved me."). To them, she is no longer their own, and to herself she "was no longer a daughter." Her lie effaces truths about them she had so long presumed.

In other stories, Crone ridicules the ambiguity of sexual roles and mores. In "Defining Affairs," she entangles all sorts of "affairs"—lesbian, marital, adulterous, linguistic—into a narrative straight jacket. The author focuses mainly on women, but her subject is people. She remarks of a character's daughter whose "puberty had been full of surprises," "The last I heard, she is a boy."

In the title story, a novella, in which many of these themes and circumstances are reprised, Crone gives us men who "perpetuate everything inessential." But these are the remarks of women who are themselves snagged in an emotional rut—daughters so at odds with their mothers that both fail even to recognize each other, fail to see how much they have in common, fail to realize how much they need each other. Old hostilities are rekindled in moments of tenderness as each is left to fend for herself in a life in which "The only reason left to live was a desire not to die, and, more recently, brute curiosity."

Most of the stories are rescued by Crone's brisk humor, but not all of them are on target. "During a Night in Winter" and "Having Always Confused My Body With Hers," are weak by comparison, despite some wonderful moments of language (my favorite line: "Our elbows were as grimy as pencil erasers"). She is at her best when the ground situation can encompass fully her intended metaphor, as in "The Kudzu," which "made things into mounds with places for animals to hide."

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From the Bottom Up is a collection of ten stories by Leigh Allison Wilson, for which this very young author won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. A few of Wilson's pieces are extremely derivative of O'Connor. "The Raising" is a reworking of O'Connor's Misfit and Grandmother from "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," as if the two had met at an earlier stage of their lives. But Little Darryl is as satanic a character as you are likely to meet in fiction, and he is very much Wilson's own.

Like O'Connor, Wilson draws us characters whose very grotesqueness compels us to confront them, to look at them so we will not turn ourselves into pillars of salt for *not* looking. Her kids are ugly and scrawny, and her adults have names like Old Blackburn and Mildred Motley, who from her porch shoots people with her imaginary gun, even a thousand miles away. They are characters who come to feel sudden and terrible displacement, isolation, in a world in which they exist rock bottom, having more in common with the dead than the living.

The serpentine Tennessee Hills soon come into the picture and sprawl across the stories, a dominant image. Wilson's strength is that she relies on characters she knows, situations she has seen, but with proper distance: "The danger is that, by becoming too familiar with one's surroundings, things recede into invisibility—they do not exist and, by extension, neither do you."

We learn in these excellent stories (like "The Snipe Hunters") who the real snipe are: the human snipe, the leeches, the sophists (greedy and selfish, like the narrator's uncle and aunt). You must be on the watch for them, for yourself: "Not to be a snipe hunter is to throttle your own throat day after day . . . for if you don't at least hunt for snipes, you can never know that the hole is profoundly empty. You are already dead by your own hand, you do not exist."

The stories move like a current of sorrow. We read of Leota in "Invictus" who must take refuge from her parents' violent, shattered marriage in the ghostly memory of her dead Mamaw and we read of relief from the "crucible of emotion," in a life riddled with fluke and fatal accidents. In "South of the Border," a young woman must go home to her family where a cousin her age is dying—going home, that is, to the soft edges, the blurred realities "that glow headlong backwards beneath your feet." These characters are like the young girl of "Broken Mirrors," locked into domestic misery, "afraid she might see something," like Old Blackburn, groping "around on the grass for something to hold on to."

Her characters are blind to the foreboding of death, to their indiscriminate passions and screaming infidelities. In "The Professors," she depicts with maturity and skill the brutal hypocrisy of the human heart. As in "The Wellest Day," we see ourselves in her fiction like the old woman who knows well that we "are so full of ourselves, we cannot see."

At times, Wilson can knock us off our feet with an image, a line, that will say more than all the aphorisms that sometimes clog her prose: such as that picture of the geologist who is now "his own specimen, buried under 6 ft. of sand and sedimentary rock . . . and he's not going anywhere," or in a brief lingering description of a girl, "her face a question mark that trailed down to the dot of her mouth," or in the depiction of a woman whose "moods had taken on the peculiar aspect of a constantly flipped coin."

At her best, in a story like "Country Blues for Melissa," Wilson marvels us with believable faces, a strange little girl who can provide a lost soul with all the raw material he could need to become a Country & Western singer, if she will only listen for it. "*It* is a view of the world from the bottom up, blood rushing toward the brain, arms trembling, feet flailing. It wants more than anything in the world to see things right-side up, and it's scared to death it will."

The last I saw of Alvah Bessie was as the star of a HUAC movie. But before his Hollywood Ten days and prison, Bessie had been an accomplished novelist and short story writer, publishing in *Scribners*, *Esquire*, and *New Masses*. Chandler & Sharp has now collected 17 of his stories under the title *Solo Flight*, within a double volume called *Alvah Bessie's Short Fictions*.

There are no long, lost masterpieces here, but competent work of more a naturalist than a political radical, more influenced than influential.

A few stories, early ones mostly, are oversimplified. In "Redbird," for instance, a young boy who fancies himself a macho hunter kills a beautiful cardinal, only to perceive the utter brutality of existence. Out of penance, he hangs himself. Bessie liked to work toward the interior of personality, utilizing stream of consciousness technique. In "A Little Walk," a man begins to imagine things about his wife, who has not yet returned from a walk—things that could have happened to her, that he wants to happen, that he wished had never happened, that will never happen.

In so many stories, city folk leave for the country where they hope to find the spiritual beauty lost in the city and hidden in the land. What they find is the emptiness, barrenness, indifference of nature, the inexorable order of things. In "Horizon," a young writer goes to sea only to discover that "it was impossible for him, try as he would, to feel anything but humble in the presence of the only real god whose sanctum he had ever dared invade." In "Only We Are Barren," a perfect dramatization of Frost's "Design," an artist fails to learn that he must rely upon his intuition, savor questions, not answers as he grapples with the mysteries of nature. When his sterile wife tells him that she would love to paint him (he has taught her how), he cannot understand her spontaneity, cannot see that in momentary inspiration lies the fruit, as profound and miraculous as conception.

In "Sam's Woman," we sit in vigil of an old woman who must die among neighbors and relations as predacious as animals. But one woman embraces the banality of existence to realize the kind of love the old woman had once known from her husband. In Bessie's fiction, this is the only way to survive—to know that "in the mere continuity of the days there lay the answer to what had so long terrified the race."

For Bessie, meaning must be found in symbols: still birth, infertility, miscarriage, death, and suffering. A father, with no money to purchase his infant's coffin, must bury his son in a tiny, cardboard box: "He glanced around to see that no one was looking, then hastily bent to kiss the yellow face that was so much like his own." Men confront these symbols again and again in the hunt, in their pasts, in battle.

Bessie's war stories are among his best. A flyer is unable to keep his mind from wandering as he thinks about the doomed below, "bringing death and grief and pain and the hor-

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ror of man's ingenuity." But this is contrasted solidly against the logistical and tactical necessity of his role as a pilot: he is told, "Go ahead; do it again and stop *dreaming.*" The suffering of the old and infirm is juxtaposed against the strength of the able. When a soldier is forced to loot a house to feed his pinned-down troops, he comes across a sick old woman who had been abandoned there, like the house itself, amidst filth and hunger. She is an innocent victim of war, an irony that is compounded by the fact that it is her house that is pounded by enemy artillery fire, not the troops. In "My Brother, My Son," a Jewish family desperately tries to recoup the loss of their son, a war hero. They invite a friend of his to stay with them, in effect to take his place, which he cannot do; he must get on with his own life; his own loneliness and sense of loss will not be mollified by what he saw there: "bitterness, resentment, emptiness—I was a stranger here." This is the fate of other Bessie protagonists: Sam of "Man With Wings," who wants badly to make contact with the son he's never known, but "there was no place to go, and he was lonesome." Or Field in "Call it Love," in whom "the loneliness . . . coiled and congealed."

A few stories show Bessie to have a keen sense of humor; "Profession of Pain" and "A Personal Issue" are fine comic pieces. Unfortunately Bessie did not rely on that talent more often. His personal ethos appears to be summed up best in "Call it Love": "You must not lose touch . . . you must keep contact; and even if that was the end, this might well be the beginning, or if not the beginning, a beginning, a reëstablishment of contact, the first painful knitting of the wound."

Jerome Klinkowitz blurbs of Mark Leyner's *I Smell Esther Williams:* "I admire Leyner's talent and daring in pushing language this far." This sort of accolade has become something of a cliché in our post-structuralist times, this pushing of language, that is, supposedly sending it over some restrictive border like an illegal alien.

That Leyner has talent is true enough. His fiction is right out of the school headmastered by Steve Katz and Ronald Sukenick, whose works one could look at as narratives on Nembutal, sentences strung out on smack. It is nearly impossible to discuss their work unless you are committed to staying with it, plying it, bending it, giving it meaning. Actually, this is fun and rewarding. Sukenick's *98.6* will yield some fine moments. With Leyner, you must do the same thing, wrestle with passages such as, "Reading about nitrogen fixation, that process that lays the foundations for the synthesis of proteins, the sadness of my friends popped into my mind and I admitted the possibility that I had read instead of the authoritative text, Speer's memoirs entitled *Inside the Third Reich.*" This passage has about as much meaning as any in any of these stories. For Leyner, nothing is contextual; words rather are tossed into the spin cycle of a washing machine.

When I do think of anyone doing any pushing to language, I have to think about Angela Carter, whose *Fireworks*, I hope, is not already out of print by the time this review is published.

Her works, also, do not give in easily to interpretation. I can begin with comparisons to Proust, Borges, and Calvino or (as Carter does herself) to Hoffman and Poe, but she can be more brilliant than all of them. Her details are intoxicating; her prose an inscrutable acrostic or crossword puzzle. Her paragraphs read like little, perfect essays; like the fireworks she writes of, they explode into meaning and hang "dissolving earrings on the night." Her sentences are wild swans turning cartwheels; her words industrious ants carrying ten times their weight, congregating in a humming network resembling a single, social organism. To call her a fabulist is hardly enough. She is a writer of dreams that have dreams.

Many of the *Fireworks* stories take place in Japan, yet their proper setting is the imagination and memory. These are tales of love built solely on appearances "under a disoriented moon which was as angry a purple as if the sky had bruised its eye." Or they are tales of love lost and searched for "through the aromatic labyrinth of alleys" and found in a room that "was a box of oiled paper full of the echoes of the rain." They are tales of incestuous fathers who cut off the heads of their incestuous sons, and they are tales of new geographies, Edenic gardens, revealing "the inexpressible entirety, the hitherto unguessed at, unknowable, inexpressible vistas of love." There is the tale of madness and fever derived from "a propensity for savagery in the love betwen master and slave. There is the tale of loneliness as "desolate as the smile of winter," in which the woman waits for the time when "there will be a hesitant rattle of knuckles on the seaward facing door and the riders will wait in ceremonious silence until I come, for their bodies are only images."

That we see ourselves as kinds of images is a theme that Carter weaves throughout her stories. In "The Loves of Lady Purple," a puppet-master suffers the fate of all the lovers of his simulacrum, the notorious Lady Purple, the famous prostitute and wonder of the East! Once alive, she had been transformed into a marionette, for she was and is the "quintessence of eroticism." Now "the sleeping wood had awakened" to destroy her master ("She sank her teeth into his throat and drained him."). She burns everything behind her "like a paper lantern ignited by its own candle" and walks toward the brothel, "like a homing pigeon, out of logical necessity," again "entirely the image of irresistible evil."

In a futuristic piece, an anti-utopian dream, young rebels confront the irony of their own existences: "Our illogic began to approach a kind of harsh virtue; although we looked at one another with veiled, estranged eyes, who were we, what were we becoming?"

In "Reflections," Carter's masterpiece in this collection, a tale of male/female, self/anti-self paradoxes intersected by the presence of a knitting androgyne, stuns us with its splendid narrative, disguised as a conundrum and told as if from the viewpoint of a mirror. A single passage speaks clearly what occurs: "The girl bent and picked up the shell. She scrutinized the mirror and took aim at some spot within it that seemed to her a logical target for the shell. I saw her raise her arm to throw the shell into the mirror and I saw her mirrored arm raise the shell to throw it outside the mirror. Then she threw the duplicated shell. There was no sound in the room but the click of the knitting needles when she threw the shell into the mirror while her reflection threw the shell out of the mirror. The shell, when it met its own reflection, disappeared immediately."

—Richard Orodenker

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The Original Activist

Lowenstein: Acts of Courage and Belief, edited by Gregory Stone and Douglas Lowenstein. Harcourt. $18.95

The subject is Allard Lowenstein. It was William F. Buckley, Jr., an unlikely admirer, who described him as being "in our time, *the* original activist." As such, Al Lowenstein becomes for many of us a heroic figure. But how can a biographer deal with a political hero in these days of sophisticated cynicism? More to the point, how do *we*?

Al Lowenstein was in politics all his adult life. With the exception of the presidential candidates themselves, he had more dedicated followers than any public figure of the '60s and '70s. He also had more enemies. The chances of compiling a balanced biography seem slight. Editors Stone and Lowenstein (a nephew) must have been aware of this for they have done their best to remain in the background. They have collected a great variety of documents both by and about Al Lowenstein, arranging the material chronologically and limiting their commentary to factual details. Although their admiration is reflected in their selections, the overall effect is balanced and insightful. One ends up knowing the man—not quite as a personal friend, but as an astonishing acquaintance.

To describe this work as a collection of documents in no way reflects its sense of drama. His speeches before hostile audiences (the radical left hated him as much as did Nixon); his report on underground work in Africa, in which his life was in danger; his descriptions of Mississippi when freedom workers dared not stay in the same house for more than two consecutive nights—all this provides an impact which is far more dramatic than many historical or biographical accounts.

In addition to his own speeches and reports, there is an impressive array of articles about him. Such authors as Jacob Brackman, Flora Lewis, and Hendrick Hertzberg described his work for *The New Yorker.* David Halberstam analyzed his impact on President Johnson's career in *Harper's.* Jimmy Breslin, Edward Kennedy, and William F. Buckley, Jr., wrote tributes in retrospect. And the Forward and Introduction were written by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and James A. Wechsler respectively. Few activists have been chronicled by such a distinguished group of analysts.

What concerns me here, however, is the degree to which the book unfolds aspects of Lowenstein's life which even his admirers may have missed. The first of these has to do with the range of his political activities. He was all over the place, doing all kinds of things, with all kinds of people.

Most of us are familiar with his civil rights work in Mississippi, and with his campaign to dump President Johnson. But those are merely the more publicized activities in a life which appears to be one long struggle for equality and the right to vote.

He was born in 1929, making him old enough to recall Franklin Roosevelt as a vivid and impressive figure. Later he met Eleanor Roosevelt while working for Adlai Stevenson. His early association with them and with Hubert Humphrey (in Humphrey's liberal days) helped to form his political philosophy.

Long before he became involved in the Mississippi civil rights movement, he had traveled at the request of native representatives to South-West Africa (now Namibia) to gather information on living conditions of the black majority. His experiences in Africa were dangerous (he was there illegally and had to be hidden), but they were formative. They gave him a perspective on racial violence wherever it occurs.

When he came to Mississippi in nineteen-sixty-three and -sixty-four to help organize the Freedom Vote, he was again in a dangerous situation. As he later wrote: "I remember one night that has been for me . . . a major force in the shaping of what I wanted to do with my life." It was a night in Jackson, Mississippi on—incredibly—Lynch Street. (What writer of fiction would stoop to that irony?) He and Stokely Carmichael and others were in a house which was being shot at from outside and he recalls being told "that we would all be killed."

For some, that experience could have been traumatic. It would be easy to say, "I've served my time. No more of that." But Lowenstein brought to that campaign a perspective established in Africa. The range of his experience gave him a special strength and may account for his ability to maintain optimism in the face of terrible trials.

Back in New York, he managed to serve one term in Congress, but the Republican legislature then gerrymandered his district. When he moved his family to remain in the same district, his opponents accused him of being an outsider and—in a closely fought campaign, he lost his bid for a second term.

Although he never won another elective office, he never stopped being politically active. He ran and lost as a Reform Democratic candidate in a Brooklyn district in what must have been about the dirtiest election on record; he was elected chairperson of ADA, served as a delegate to the infamous Democratic National convention of '72, worked for Jerry Brown, served as the U.S. Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, made another congressional bid. He visited Eastern Europe several times and was in Prague, Czechslovakia on the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion of that country. He maintained a life-long concern for Spain, speaking Spanish fluently and maintaining contact with those who would later reëstablish democracy there.

The man never stopped. He was perpetually in motion both here and abroad right down to the day in March, 1980, when, at the age of 51, he was shot and killed in his office by a psychotic.

One's first impression is astonishment at his energy and range of activities. One then begins to notice how consistent he was. Unlike other reformers, from Henry Wallace to Eugene McCarthy, he never wavered in his commitment to liberal causes and candidates. Nor did he burn out. Whether working in Spain, Africa, Mississippi, or the political snake pit of Brooklyn, he preached the same line, worked for the same goals.

Even when so many of us were, like myself, inching leftward or, going still further, embracing the hard radicalism of SDS, Lowenstein

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maintained a steady course—opposed to violence (except in Africa), opposed to street action, and unapologetically supporting electoral politics. Reading his speeches from 1956 (to the National Student Congress) to 1979 (testimony to a Congressional Committee regarding peace in Zimbabwe), I could not detect the slightest shift in basic philosophy or a hint of slackening in his optimism.

It took courage for a man who clearly enjoyed the adoration of tens of thousands of student activists to tell them that they were moving in an increasingly dangerous direction. Here is what he said to the radicalized class of '69 at Harvard—a group which included many who had just completed their share of violent action and were about to do more:

> Will someone please tell me how it hurts racism in South Africa to assault the president of Cornell? Do we really help end the war by shouting down James Reston or hurling profanities at Mary Bunting? Are we contributing to the downfall of the military-industrial complex by burning down ROTC shacks . . .? Will gutting the First Amendment make it easier to create a republic with liberty and justice for all?

Those may seem like mere truisms in these nonpolitical times, but in 1969 the political center was no man's land, subject to bombardment from both sides. Indeed, the right wing continued to declare him a subversive threat (Charles Colson had already placed Lowenstein as "Number 7" on the White House "enemies list"), and the radicals, ignoring his advice, did their best to shout him down at a meeting in Connecticut.

So for all his energy and the great diversity of activities, Al Lowenstein was more consistent than most of us who were active at that time. He rode the middle course, supporting electoral politics even when others had despaired of conventional methods. But in spite of this consistency, the book reveals a fascinating dichotomy in the man: on the one hand, he could sound like the impassioned prophet, speaking from outside the true seat of power, warning against political, moral, and social disaster; yet on the other hand he could act like an experienced and hard-headed politician, getting out the vote and doing well under impossible conditions.

His evangelical voice surfaced early. Speaking before the National Student Congress in 1956, at the age of 27, he lambasted his own generation in the tradition of Old Testament prophets:

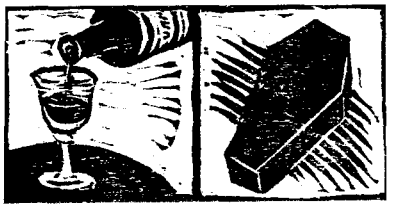
> We are the privileged and antiseptic generation. We move in the backwater of great events, well clothed, well housed, and well fed. Struggle is not our hallmark and greatness is not our necessity. We are becoming lazy on the victorious sacrifices of our older brothers and on the nonfulfillment of gloomy prophecies.

In 1962 he completed *Brutal Mandate: A Journey to South West Africa*. Although the work is a factual report based on his own experiences, he is able to link the African agony with similar injustices around the world. Rising above political allegiances, he attacks tyrannies both on the left and the right. It is this overview, this global perspective, that gives his writing a prophetic voice:

> . . . If time is running out for South Africa, so is it also running out for America in South Africa. For the machine guns and horsewhips of Sharpeville and Cape Town are no farther from America's jugular than are the jungles of Laos, the firing squads of Havana, or the bridge at Andau.

Were this his only stance, he would still have been an important voice, an appeal for reason and for justice in a period when both were in short supply. But he was also a tough politician. He won his place in Congress the hard way—door-to-door canvassing, struggling to raise money, appealing to students to supply the leg work which the party regulars would not. He won, but then the Republicans broke up his district in such a way as to exclude his home.

Narrowly defeated in the new district, he accepted the request of Democratic Party reformers in Brooklyn to run in the primary against a hawkish veteran, John Rooney. This was in a district made up of Italians, Poles, blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Hasidic Jews. He performed an astonishing feat by establishing a constituency in this most unhomogenized of districts. But the campaign turned out to be one of the dirtiest on record, and the entire election was thrown out by the courts. The rerun was even worse.



All this was enough to embitter almost anyone. Yet I cannot find in any of these interviews—some conducted late at night after the most trying of circumstances—the slightest hint of cynicism or even bitterness. Lowenstein refused to give up. Speaking of his second disastrous primary fight, he said,

> It is not that the system works or doesn't work, whatever that means. The system is here. . . . It is incumbent upon all of us who are committed to turning this nation toward its much-needed reordering of priorities to reclaim the system and make it work for the benefit of all Americans.

Was the man a saint? Any biography which implies perfection is suspect. And these documents do suggest that Al Lowenstein was one of the major figures of our times, limited only by a cruel succession of bad breaks.

But a few subtle criticisms are buried in the praise. As Wechsler points out in his introduction, some feel that Lowenstein "leaped too feverishly from one area of conflict to another, thereby diluting his influence in each place." Although Wechsler is quick to discredit the judgment, it may indeed be the case that Lowenstein's own political impulsiveness was one factor that kept him from genuine power.

Every biography suggests another. This one is a splendid account of his public life told both in his words and in those of his admirers. There is a private existence, however, which is never touched upon. Like Gandhi, Lowenstein had complex personal needs. I would like to think that eventually a psychobiographer with the sensitivity and compassion of Erik Erikson would explore the complex ways in which his political alliance with the younger generation spilled over into personal relationships. Correctly done, such a study would in no way diminish Al Lowenstein's enormous contribution. But until it is done, the story will not be complete. Most readers will be left with this enduring impression: there is indeed a liberal tradition; it is possible to maintain it even during historical periods which reduce many to bitterness and cynicism; and those who do this rise to a heroic level. Al Lowenstein was, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., put it, "the supreme agitator of his day." —*Stephen Minot*

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Regional Pleasure Palaces

My senior year at the University of Iowa, an English major with a minor in Creative Writing, what I knew was I wanted to write and that writers didn't get rich quick. So the sage advice imparted in some class or other was well taken: it's a good idea to have something to do to make your living, plan to write in whatever other time is left out of the sleeping and the eating and the working.

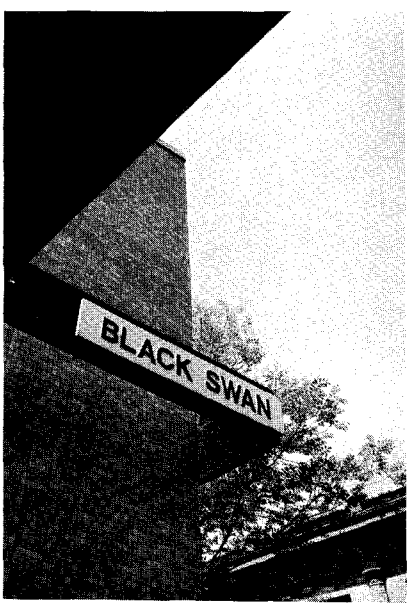
It's strange, the confluence of events—or it's synchronistic and not strange at all—but it so happened in that long ago senior year that I became the stage manager for "Campus Capers," an all-university variety show directed, produced and written by a good friend in the drama department. And that was the beginning of my career (though I didn't know it then) in *show business*—which, down through the years, has been sometimes an escape from the white terror of the blank page, or a distraction from it, or an excuse, but always a competition. Which—looking back—I am often of two or three or many minds about.

The smell of grease-paint and the roar of the crowd; no business like show business! "Campus Capers" went up on the stage in the same auditorium where the lectures for the core course, History of Western Civilization, were given when I was a freshman. Four years had passed, the good and bad of those years in Iowa were coming to an end, and I was in love with one of the acts, a blond girl who wore blue net stockings, a daring tight blue costume—like a leotard—festooned with blue sequins, and danced in a blue spot to . . . . . Ah—I've forgotten. What I remember is looking out on stage from my cubby in the wings, my script full of light cues and stage directions, to see her sexy, elusive dancing shape, the metaphor of a dream. Alas, our salutations, her smile going on and coming off, were as close as we ever got.

And down the line four more years, after the army and a failed marriage, searching around New York City for something to support me while I wrote, it was the stage managing that got me my first job in movies. A writer friend said why didn't I apply at this place he's doing scripts for? They're busy—it's a fill-in until something steady shows up. And the producer/director/owner of this tiny industrial film company on West 47th Street said, "Well, stage managing in theatre is like being an assistant director in film, you want to try that?" So I did—along with building sets, shooting titles, learning to splice original and a lot more.

That's where it started, those *good and bad* years around movies—working on them, eventually coming to write about them—and doing other writing too, but neither as much of it as I would have liked, nor satisfied that it was as good as I wanted it to be. The times change, television came, and my children grew up; we have come to the Reagan years. Most movies are concerned with comic-book science fiction, adolescent sex and drug use, violence and explicit bloody mayhem. The exceptions, like the gently beautiful "Tender Mercies" (with Robert Duval, directed by Australian Bruce Beresford), make the contrast more poignant.

If once the experience of a film was mysterious and enthralling, sharing the darkness of the theatre with the rest of the audience, watching the big screen on which these figures performed for us our dreams, now—mostly—that experience is rare. Used to television, audiences at the movies act as if they are at home before the small screen, restless and contentious. The shared experience is gone, most films are crap, and in recent years I have become bored and burned out. Finding theatre again is like coming home.



> "Theatre is the most *ubiquitous* of arts. No culture has ever existed that did not have its theatre in some form. For theatre, quite simply, is the art of people acting out—and giving witness to—their most pressing, most illuminating, and most inspiring concerns. Theatre is at once a showcase and a forum, a medium through which a society's ideas, fashions, moralities, and entertainments can be displayed and its conflicts, dilemmas, and struggles can be debated. . . .
>
> "For theatre is, above all, a *living* art form, a *process*, an *event* that is fluid in time, feeling, and experience. It is not simply a matter of 'plays,' but of 'playing'; and a play is composed not simply of 'acts,' but of 'acting.' As 'play' and 'act' are both noun and verb, so theatre is both a 'thing' and a 'happening.'"
>
> (From *Theatre*, by Robert Cohen)

Broadway is an avenue in New York City that extends the length of Manhattan Island from the Bronx to the Battery. But "Broadway"—a group of mostly antiquated playhouses west of 5th Avenue between 42nd and 50th streets—is also the generic term for top-of-the-line theatre in the United States. According to what I read, the once bright jewel is losing its luster, its audience, and its art. The specter—ironically similar to the motion pictures and television—is that it has become an *industry* which, because of astronomical costs, must sell its product on a commercial market. Ticket prices with a high of $50 and an average of $25 mean producing a product for an audience that has the means to pay the freight—tourists, expense accounters, the affluent—and that means don't take risks in what is put on.

In the May issue of *Theatre Communications*, put out by Theatre Communications Group (TCG) is an

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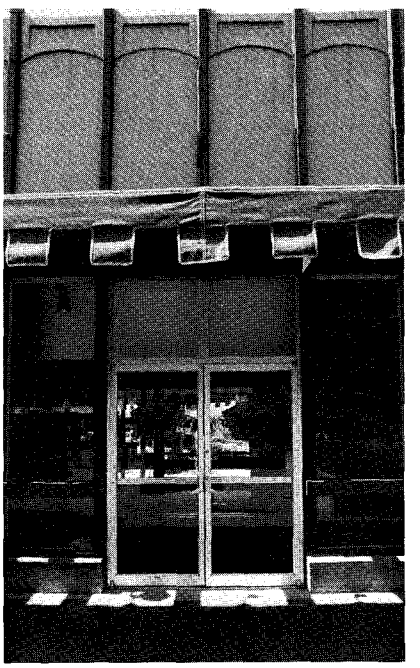
opinion, reprinted from "The New Republic," written by its drama critic, Robert Brustein, (also Artistic Director for the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, an English professor at Harvard, and the author of several books on theatre). He writes of "the $5 million budget of 'My One and Only' plus box office (which) would support a large permanent company and staff of an average sized resident non-profit theatre for five seasons of thirty-five plays, not to mention the cost of its touring, teaching, and outreach programs." He mentions that the cost of the publicity/advertising photographs of the stars of this play, Twiggy and Tommy Tune, $50,000, would pay for the run of three productions for six weeks in repertory. And, believe it, that the $100,000 budgeted expense of the limousines to transport them around could subsidize student discounts for a year.

He writes that this theatre, Broadway, is "pretending to be a medium of entertainment while actually engaged in reducing risk and maximizing profits. . . . It is not hard to predict what is going to happen . . . Competition is bound to grow more ferocious, and the capacity for daring and innovation will diminish to the vanishing point. . . . Creative people will be treated as ruthlessly as in any large corporation where they fail to deliver the goods, and the scramble for survival will be guided only by the laws of the jungle."

Broadway, and pleasure palaces indeed. Then what is this other: The American Repertory of Cambridge, The American Conservatory Theatre of San Francisco, American Stage Festival of Milford, New Hampshire, American Theatre Company of Tulsa, American Theatre Company in Aspen, The American Stage Company of St. Petersburg, American Jewish Theatre at the 92nd St. Y? Listed in the TCG Theatre Directory are 200-plus theatres, in Alaska and Hawaii and most other states. In the San Francisco area alone are 91 companies, according to TCCBA (Theatre Communications Center of the Bay Area). They are the regionals, and only a few of them have pleasure palaces to go up in.

I have never *not* been a theatregoer; my actress daughter is now attending classes at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. Bred in the bone, I guess; my mother was a talented amateur actress in the community theatre of my home town; as a child I was forced to read lines with her when she was learning a part—and perhaps the same fantasy world that her roles were for her I sought in writing fiction. When I lived in New York I went to plays; two of the best films I worked on were adapted from stage pieces. "Miracle Worker," was directed by Arthur Penn, who worked in both mediums, and in the early, classic television (yes, there were times when on network TV you could see good stuff). And "Long Day's Journey into Night" (a classic film, I think), directed by Sydney Lumet; it starred three great stage/film actors: Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson, Jason Robards—I will never forget the feeling that used to shake me as I watched and listened to them speak O'Neill's lines—never mind that it was in the controlled (by me—the Assistant Director) confusion of a movie set.



In the last two years I have become more than just a goer, I have *found* regional theatre taking place on more or less conventional stages, or ones where there was little or no separation from the audience. Either way, I have felt in the immediacy of the medium, the connection between audience, play and performer, an excitement that enthralls while it informs.

Perhaps Chautauqua Societies were the archetype for regional theatre. This adult educational movement came to be in 1873, in Chautauqua, New York. Men named Vincent and Miller proposed to the Methodist Episcopal Camp meeting that secular (the arts, science, and humanities) as well as religious instruction be included in the summer Sunday School institute. Eventually 200-300 other communities copied the idea. Authors, explorers, musicians, political leaders lectured, and a variety of entertainment was offered. This mixture of revival meeting and country fair flourished until 1924.

In Ashland, Oregon, the Elizabethan Stagehouse, one of the three theatres of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival (a.k.a. Ashland) is built over the ruins of the Chautauqua Dome that opened on July 5, 1893. People from all over southern Oregon and Northern California travelled to Ashland to attend the festivities which were open for 10 days every summer. In 1917 the old dome was taken down and a new and more impressive one, measuring 160 feet in diameter, was erected. That was short-lived, however, for in the early '20s the movement was waning, and in the early '30s the dome was taken down for fear it would fall down—but the old foundations remained.

In 1934 Angus Bowmer, who taught at Southern Oregon Normal School (which has become Southern Oregon State College), saw the resemblance of those circular foundations to the Globe Theatre of Elizabethan England, and it was his idea to produce a Shakespearean Festival—three performances of two plays for the city's 4th of July celebration. So, on July 2, 1935, the forerunner of one of the most prestigious (and largest) regional theatres in this country was born. And continuously, with the exception of the years around World War II, 1940-1947, Ashland's festival has grown and prospered.

In 1935 it was three performances of two plays before an audience of 500; in 1982 it was 543 performances of 12 plays in three theatres for an audience of 288,758, a new record—with 15,500 more patrons than in 1981. That year it was 88% of capacity—in 1982 it was approximately 92% of capacity, and only 10% of them lived within 125 miles of Ashland—42% came from the rest of Oregon, 44% from California, and the remaining 14% from Washington state, Canada, the rest of the United States, and the world.

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The Elizabethan stage has gone through several permutations. The original suffered damage in a fire in 1940, which was to signify the interruption of the festival until 1947 when a new and more elaborate theatre was erected. Through the '40s and '50s the festival expanded, ancillary programs were added, and critical acclaim and popularity grew. In 1958 the existing stagehouse (1,173 seats) replaced the one which the Ashland Fire Marshal had declared a hazard, and Ashland's growth continued.

In 1970 The Angus Bowmer Theatre (601 seats) opened, one of the nicest theatres I have ever been in. As well as allowing the season to be expanded into the spring and fall months, it made matinee performances possible in the scorching heat of Ashland's summer. In the spring of 1977, a third theatre, the Black Swan, opened. An intimate room which seats 150 more or less (depending on the production and its *mise en scene*), in it there's little separation between actor and audience, and it's home to the experimental and innovative in plays, staging, acting, and design.

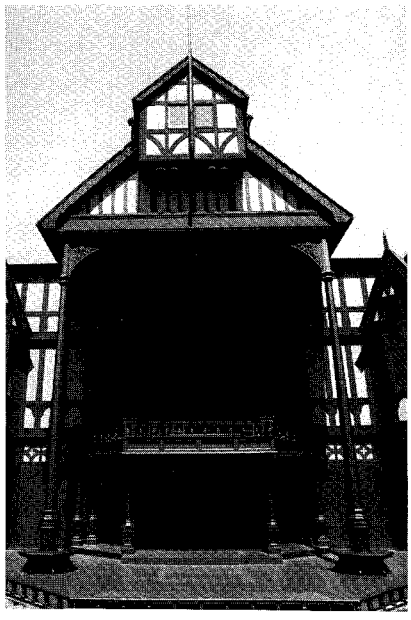
On theatre's traditional dark Monday, in Ashland special programs are offered: the Monday Medley concert series—symphony to jazz to folk; magicians and comedy acts; the Monday classic film series unreels in the Bowmer. In addition to all the theatre through the week, there are morning classes (Wake Up with Shakespeare) where, in an informal setting, the plays and the performances are discussed with the performers; through the summer various other special events take place: the backstage tours, the informal lectures in beautiful Lithia Park where you can feed the swans, have a picnic lunch, and more.

Besides, this small, unspoiled (if slightly over-boutiqued) Oregon city has good restaurants, charming bed-and-breakfast inns. The Rogue River Valley is peaceful, a haven; I have gone there now for several years, and written about it before in these pages. This year I went specifically to talk about regional theatre with two festival stalwarts: Actor/Director Denis Arndt, and Ashland's Assistant Artistic Director, and director, Dennis Bigelow.

As to theatre's being one-to-one between the actor and the audience, Arndt, both a principal director and one of the leading actors in residence at Ashland, said, "There is no substitute for the live, breathing creature doing it at that moment." And the value of theatre? "It performs a very deep—almost a religious function . . . You get something in it you can't get anywhere else . . . very ancient and ritualistic; I'm sure it's all connected with religion.

"Look at the kind of commitment people have to make to get to Ashland," he said. "Drive fifteen hundred miles, spend money to put their families up, to eat, and then pay pretty good prices for the tickets. By the time the doors are shut and the house lights go down it's quite a commitment. They want you to be real good, and I think, sometimes, *that* makes us better than we truly are: I think you get something in theatre you can't get anywhere else."

A native of Washington state,



Denis Arndt's training was primarily in high school, under the tutelage of a "stickler for basics" teacher who taught his students "standard American" speech and how to move. It was a good drama department that mounted five 3-act plays a year, touring them to other schools. But then, after one semester on a drama scholarship at Washington State, Arndt hated it and left theatre, not to return for 15 years.

In between it was the army, flying helicopters in Europe, Vietnam, then as a civilian bush pilot in Alaska. Thinking he had accumulated too many accident-free hours, riding with Lady Luck, he figured he better "crawl out of the cockpit" before she did. So he applied to the University of Washington, reading history in the graduate program and managing an apartment building. Then, in one of those synchronicities we are heir to, a friend from his youth, temporarily in town to direct a couple of plays, stayed in the building. Asked to read for a part, Arndt told him "that part of my life is gone forever."

It can happen this way: in a heavy snowstorm the night of the reading, Arndt gave his friend a ride, then went in to have a cup of coffee. Friend said, While you're waiting, why not look over the script? Which he did—and listening to the other readers thought he could do better. So he read, was cast and has been working the 11 years since. The Empty Space, the Intiman Theatre Company, Seattle Repertory; the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego; various places in British Columbia; Ashland: regional theatre.

And Hollywood? "Well, what should I do, give up working on great literature to play a bad cop on Starsky and Hutch for one reel and three thousand—and wait eight months by the telephone for another three?" And Broadway? "Well, wouldn't that be nice? Yeah, I think one's career really changes after that happens—it's a big transition. But I think theatre lives in this country in the regionals." "The I-5 Player," he calls himself, "never far from an off-ramp."

"This organization is 48 years old," Arndt said. "Aside from how long it has lived, I think there's something special about the place, about Ashland. The Chautauqua grounds . . . that ivy-covered wall out there was the old wall of the old dome . . . Lithia Park is built on an old Indian burial ground . . . It's been a cultural nexus for some time, and now this whole complex mechanism is trying to wear a lot of hats at once. . . . It's a corporate enterprise in spite of the fact that it's non-profit. There's a big business staff making sure that the three-hundred-and-fifty thousand people come through this year. To quote a friend, 'I play a part in three hundred and fifty thousand summer vacations in between Crater Lake and the Sea-Lion caves.'

"One of the things you have to understand about regional theatre: the danger in it is looking at it as real estate. That's a hard one to keep straight sometimes. You think of Ashland, you connect it to this tre-

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mendous mechanism, this institution, this real estate, but that's not where the life of it exists at all. If there wasn't anybody here, these would be just buildings, liabilities for the community. Theatre is only a group of people getting together and putting it on, and bad theatre can happen anywhere . . . everywhere. I think it's not the real estate that makes the place, but the people who are here. The play doesn't happen until the audience gets there.

"As far as I know, [Ashland] is one of the only theatres in the country that offers a ten-month contract on an Equity scale—that allows me a whole different kind of life style. It couldn't be better, work on great literature, live here with my wife and baby . . . But I always make it a point to go someplace else, play up and down the corridor somewhere . . ."

I spoke with Arndt in the Green Room of the Bowmer theatre ("the nicest room on the coast") after a performance of "Hamlet," in which he plays Claudius. That afternoon, in the Black Swan, I had seen him in the principal role of Archie in "The Entertainer," directed by Dennis Bigelow. Two more un-alike roles it would be hard to imagine.

"The script is not the play, by any stretch of the imagination," Arndt says. "The actor brings a lot to the playwright, but at the same time I think his primary function is to get himself out of the way. You ask how I can flip-flop between Archie and Claudius. Well, it's almost as though neither one has anything to do with me. You know, I've got my wife and baby and five rabbits and chickens up the hill in a little cabin with a nice view. I have my own personal life outside the theatre, but I find a great fulfillment in being able to work, to share ideas with the audiences. Certainly you can't play any character without taking on a sort of filter through which the rest of life passes. Things that are unusable get hung up on the filter, while the rest of life goes on. Yeah, there is me-Archie and me-Claudius; there's me in all the guys I play: I feel rather balanced and healthy about it.

"But, I don't know, it's pretty much of a mystery how it happens. I think often that theatre in the twentieth century has harbored a lot of neuroses. I don't think that is necessary for good theatre. But at the same time, when you get as intimate with a playwright's idea, and your basic responsibility is to allow the audience to see, it is almost actor-as-conduit—you sort of get yourself out of the way . . . become somebody else . . . lose the self and become this conduit through which ideas pass to the audience."

About the tension between commercial and experimental or new: "That's what I'm looking for; every actor, I think, is looking for a new playwright . . . Wouldn't it be fun to find a play like 'The Entertainer' that spoke as elequently to 1983 as Osborne spoke in 1956?"

The people at Ashland run the gamut: several have been picked up by the movies, others are dedicated to the literature of theatre—are on sabbatical from colleges and universities. "With reasonable skills, able to fit into the company, they are here to get their feet wet," Arndt said. "Ashland for many years has performed an intern function for kids who come out of universities or professional theatre programs. They come here to work a couple of seasons on a scholarship basis, and then move out and on."

"You rehearse a play and you bring it in," Arndt said, "but if it's bad you still have to run it because you've sold subscription audiences." He thinks that's a pressing problem in the regionals. They are more or less adept in selling subscriptions, committing audiences for play dates as much as a year into the future. Because they need that up-front cash infusion to mount the season, it means engraving that year ahead in stone more or less. And in spite of all that's good about it, Arndt feels regional theatre has to find and hook the single ticket buyer who, on impulse one night, might decide to go to the theatre rather than a movie. Part of that would mean being flexible in what you put on, and part of that would mean making the cost competitive. "I'd like to see dollar theatre, in the Black Swan, for instance. I'm trying to push not selling titles but selling the Black Swan itself . . . change the program every two weeks, do works in progress, a vigorous exploration looking for new plays . . ."

In May, when I spoke with him, Dennis Bigelow was the Assistant Artistic Director at Ashland, had directed "The Entertainer," which I had seen the previous afternoon, and was going into dress rehearsal the coming Tuesday with "Much Ado About Nothing" which would open in the Shakespearean Playhouse. "I came late to theatre," he told me. Admitting to being a dilettante in college, wasting his time and other people's, he said: "I didn't know what I wanted to do."

From Pennsylvania, raised a Catholic, transferring from a Jesuit school in Massachusetts to Penn State, in Junior year he was advised by the dean he ought to drop out—but he didn't want to. Finally, having learned Bigelow had a recreational interest in theatre and movies, the dean sent him to the Department of Theatre and Film. Acting, directing, designing, costuming, building sets—was he interested? the chairman asked. Again, he didn't know—he didn't have an answer. The chairman said he would give him a show to stage manage. "Jack of all trades and a master of none," he would see it all; at the end of the semester he could decide what to concentrate on. At the end of the semester Bigelow went back and said I don't want any of those things, I want to be a stage manager. At that time the department didn't have an emphasis on that, but they made one.

He graduated in January of 1975. Obviously having learned the art and craft of stage managing well, he was encouraged to do the University Regional Theatre Auditions. "That's like a beauty contest—win for your school, go to semi-finals, then the finals at the Kennedy Center in Washington. You have three minutes, standing in front of eighty or ninety people who represent universities and regional theatres all over the country—you sell yourself."

For three days from 9 to 6, looking at somebody new every three minutes, that's a lot of people. An actor does an audition; designers show slides; but what does a stage manager do? Scheduled late, when a nervous Dennis walked into the room everyone looked exhausted, so he said: "Look, I know you're tired. My name is Dennis Bigelow. I'm from Penn State and I want to be your stage manager—are there any questions?" He received call-backs, got offers for short term jobs, was tempted by some graduate schools, but someplace along the line he had seen a brochure from Ashland. Liking what he saw, that's where he wanted to go. And that's what he sweated out. And a month or so later

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Ashland called; one of their stage managers was sick. He grabbed the five-month contract which paid $260 a month.

Arriving in Ashland in April of 1975, his first impressions were confused and discouraged. He had only seen a brochure. His plane landed in Medford, which is not a pretty city; the taxi took the back road to Ashland—it is not a pretty road. The festival did not have a ten-month season then, everybody was on vacation; the Mark Anthony Hotel had not been renovated; the town seemed empty and bucolic; he wondered how this place could support a theatre. "This is like farmland," he thought, "this is where hippies go to die." Then the company re-assembled (it was only 150 then), rehearsals started, opening day arrived and so did all the people, and it was wonderful. The first play he did was "Long Day's Journey into Night," directed by Jerry Turner.

Happily a stage manager, he stayed through three seasons and when he was thinking of leaving Jerry Turner offered "Private Lives" for him to direct. Scared of the challenge, nevertheless he did it, and spent two more seasons, now both directing and stage managing. Then he decided it was time to leave again, "to see if I could do this work anyplace other than Ashland."

First to the new Denver Center Theatre Company as production stage manager, which meant joining Equity. Enjoying the theatre, he hated the winter snow and cold of Colorado, so he left to do things he had not done before: a summer season of indoor musical stock in Pittsburgh—near his home and family. Then to Berkeley Repertory (which was opening its new theatre), where he did not get along well with the management. "I quit in a huff, and was totally terrorized. I mean you quit a theatre and you don't get unemployment or anything. And I have no money; I work in the theatre." But the Mitzi Gaynor national tour called, having gotten his name through the grapevine, and he spent the next half-year production managing that. On the tour, Turner called him in Atlanta, wanting him to come back to Ashland to direct "Inherit the Wind." Also Turner asked him to be Assistant Artistic Director. For some, theatre can be a peripatetic life. . . .

Thirty years old, Dennis Bigelow doesn't drive, gave up his license five years ago, deciding to live his life without an automobile. He thinks the best play ever written is "King Lear," but "I don't have favorites of anything." An avid reader of contemporary fiction "from the cheapest trash to what critics say is best. I can't interest myself in the classics because my work is dealing with the classics." He hates television, wouldn't own a set, but loves movies, and goes three or four times a week, even in Ashland.

I ask him, as I ask everybody, what's the value of theatre, and why do you do it? He answered, talking about the research he does to direct, and how that leads him to read material "in the vein of . . ." To do "Romeo and Juliet" he read Romantic literature. "Emerson wrote something about the stars and dying, that seemed very apt for that play, like a thought behind the show. So I also found this quote by Shelley that put it in perspective for me."

> *The highest moral purpose aimed at, in the highest species of drama, is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies, and antipathies, the knowledge of itself.*

"Its a visceral, touchable media event that can transport a person, teach a person in the moment something about themselves. That's what theatre does. There's danger and risk involved in it. I like the spontaneity. Theatre is a collective event; everybody participates in it at the moment.

"Regional theatre is becoming the life blood of commercial theatre. It provides a contact with theatre throughout the country . . . I mean, you used to have to wait for the touring company to come through . . . Regional theatre became the first place where the classics could live. The great plays of all times suffered miserably because they became things to read rather than things to see—I had a Shakespeare teacher who believed that he should not be produced on stage . . . And the regionals have grown as a place to encourage contemporary playwrights . . . The cost of production is so high in commercial theatre, the risk is so great . . . now all the great plays are either coming from England or from regional theatres here.

"I think regional theatre is my outlet . . . I don't have much desire to go to New York. As a director it allows me the chance to make a mistake where commercial theatre does not. You are part of the season, a limited run. In Ashland I am with 11 other plays, and the success of Ashland is not going to be made or broken by Dennis Bigelow's production of 'The Entertainer.' In the regionals I can exercise my own ideas, my opinions, without the risk to the people who have put the money up."

I comment that the press office told me that in spite of spring being a less good part of the season, in spite of this year's abominable weather, it seemed that the shows were selling at 89% of capacity—ahead of last year, which had been a record year. But speaking from his position in the Ashland hierarchy, Bigelow says, "I don't think, deep down, we feel that

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we are secure—every year the income gap becomes bigger." Ashland is considered a large theatre, and when he first came the difference between receipts and costs was 6%—that is 94% of the money needed to run came across the ticket counter, so to speak. Now with a 1983 $4.1 million operating budget, earned income is down to about 80%, leaving a gap of almost 20%. According to Bigelow the average for large theatres is about 60%, which puts Ashland ahead of the others, but still this year they are looking for $800,000-plus to make their budget. "And every year it gets larger, so I am not sure how secure we feel ourselves to be. Indeed, right now, we are going through the tortuous process of trying to select a season for next year."

The two problems, of balance between what a theatre puts on—how much of the commercial that has a pre-sold appeal, so to speak—against the innovative, experimental, or unknown, and attracting both audience and gifts or grants is a trying problem every regional theatre faces. And this season at Ashland is a penultimate one: in addition to the Shakespeare which is their staple, they will produce Shaw, Osborne, Orton, Wilder, O'Neill, their first world premiere of the new play, "Dream House." "The list," Bigelow says, "is awesome, and how to match it next season? We can't. We are going to come up with a season that is less known. If next year we offer 'Troilus and Cressida,' how does that match with 'Hamlet,' which every high school senior in the country reads. We worry about the marketing. The weakest parts of our season are the spring and fall, and it's at that time that we offer student matinees, try to encourage school groups to come."

In April of this year 18 students and their teacher came to Ashland from the Barrow High School, in Barrow, Alaska. North of the Arctic Circle and, according to Dick Wilson, the teacher, "50 miles from the nearest road," Barrow is 3000 miles from Ashland, and that's a record of some kind. "I guess this shows our dedication to the arts," Wilson said, and the group will also visit Crater Lake, and the Oregon Caves in addition to Ashland. What was that Denis Arndt said, performing between people's vacations—indeed!

Bigelow spoke of the Tony Award Ashland received this year. "How wonderful to have that recognition . . . who would think that something as stupid as an award would give us such a jolt, but I'll tell you Jerry Turner was like a little kid . . . and there's someting more to it than that. I wish I could put it into words, but we're kind of unique in a lot of ways, and one of the things is the stature of this theatre—and we are not even an Equity theatre although there is talk about that now. It's important, not so much for our reputation as for the advantages it would give to our non-professional talent.

"*Professional*," he said, "is that horrible word in the industry that implies union, and all the good and bad things about union. But one of the good things is that it makes people pay the actors, and I think talent should be paid at all costs. That's why I approve of Equity in the Bay Area. People are coming forward and saying 'No more waivers, sorry, you can't abuse people like that.' I am a believer in the union, I approve of the basic fundamental precept that a work week is limited, that you can't work beyond a certain number of hours without overtime, a certain guaranteed pay, a day off. There are good theatres that don't do any of that and I am rather appalled by it."

Bigelow told me in May that he thinks what Ashland has done for years and years is to take people and make them into theatre people, an exciting and extraordinary thing to do, given its size and economics and stature. It would be vitally important to retain that possibility within the structure of an Equity contract, not to just become an *Equity Theatre* which would mean "every single one of our actors had to be Equity" . . . but still "to take young talent (and he uses himself as an example), non-professional talent, and work them up, build them. I'm convinced that if you can do that here, you can do it anywhere."

And in July the next step for Dennis Bigelow has been taken. He will be leaving Ashland to become artistic director of the Eleanor McClatchy Performing Arts Center, in Sacramento, a theatre which has been operating as a community operation for a number of years. He has been hired to effect its transition to a professional regional company. "Recently," he said, "it had become a career goal that some day I would have my own theatre; I just didn't expect it to be tomorrow."

And I think he would say that this is due to what Ashland does, and how it works. "If anybody had told me when I arrived at this theatre in 1975 that seven years later I would be Jerry Turner's assistant, directing two shows per season, doing a lot of the casting for the company, I would have said—you're crazy. But it's an extraordinary theatre—yes, and stripping away its reputation, all that it does for its audience, it's a vital, energetic, and nurturing place to work."

In the keynote address to Theatre Communication Group's Second National Symposium, in June, Zelda Fichandler, founder and producing director for Washington's Arena Stage, said: "Our theatres live in limbo and alone, within a nation whose policy on the arts is that there is no policy. Actually, we have always lived this way and we have never had a national policy on the arts."

According to her statistics: Out there is an audience of 13,000,000 a year, and theatre employs more actors outside of New York than in it. Under Reagan a paltry 2/10 of one percent of the national budget goes for the arts—less than 5% of theatre budgets are supported by the NEA. Next year's allocation is proposed to be 13% less than this year's—which was already 9% less than last year's.

Still, she is optimistic. "It helped me to be reminded that money is an enabler, not a do-er . . . that theatre can be heavily endowed from without and poverty-stricken from within . . . Budgets are not to be scorned as beneath an artist's attention. Budgets are beautiful: they show in mathematical form the assignment of values within a particular aesthetic. Budgets are a language or a notation system; symbols for other meanings. If, for example, your budget shows that two-thirds of the money is going for salaries, then you have learned something exquisitely pertinent and poignant about the nature of your work.

"Artistic directors must of their own accord and not under duress open their minds to finding leaner production methods, as befits the times we live in. There must be ways to build lighter, give up one thing for another, imbed limitation within concept, and still maintain a personal aesthetic."

Ars longa, vita brevis est.

—Lawrence Sturhahn

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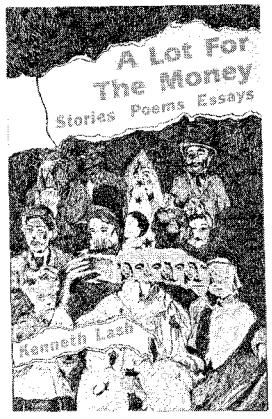

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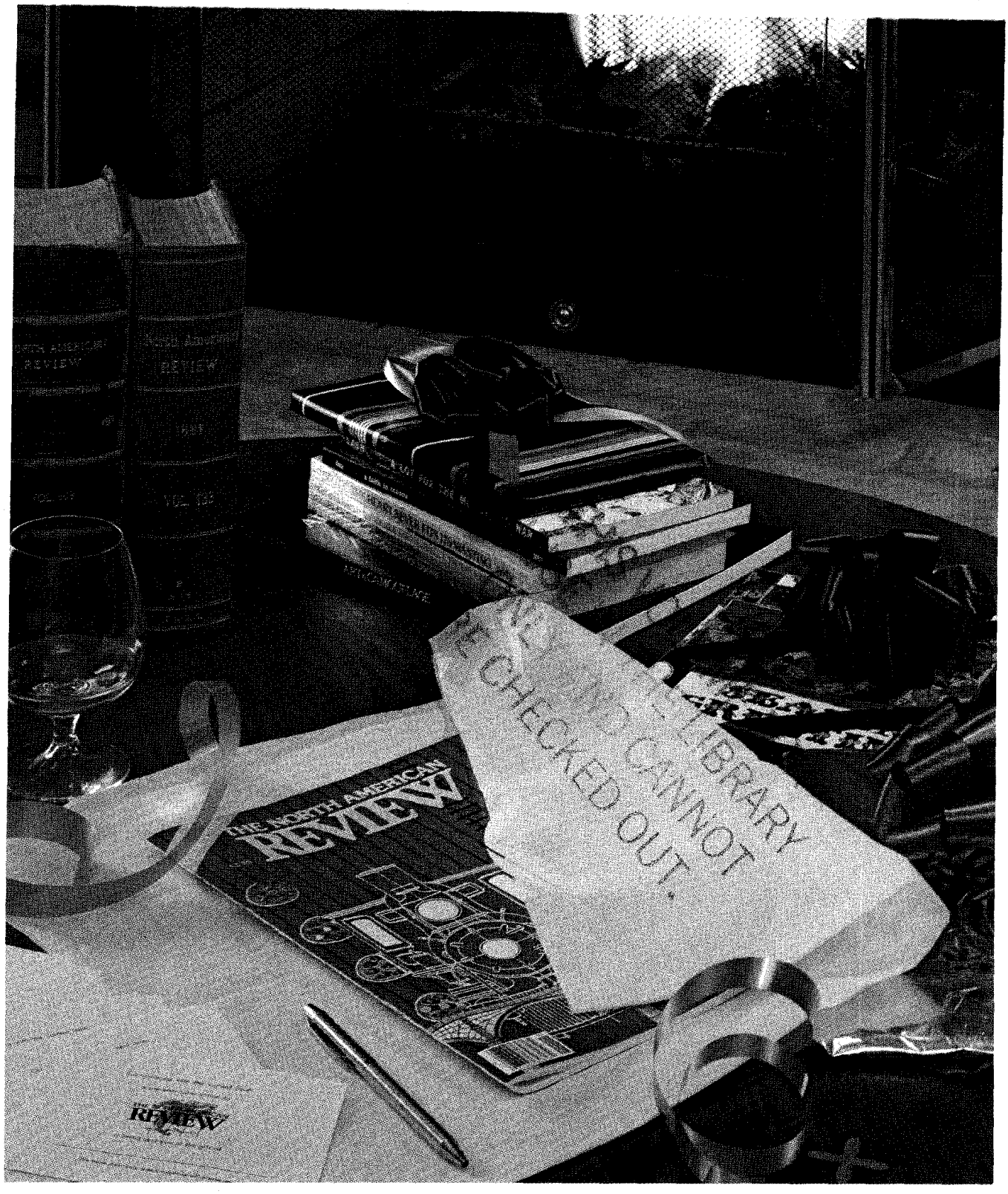

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